

理想回上王生活

理想回上

6

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渡辺恒彦 彦十
illustration 文倉

「ああ、これはフレア殿下」
王宮ではずっとドレスばかりだったフレア姫が、
今はズボンとシャツに革のベスト姿だ。



Risou no Himo Seikatsu

Volume 6

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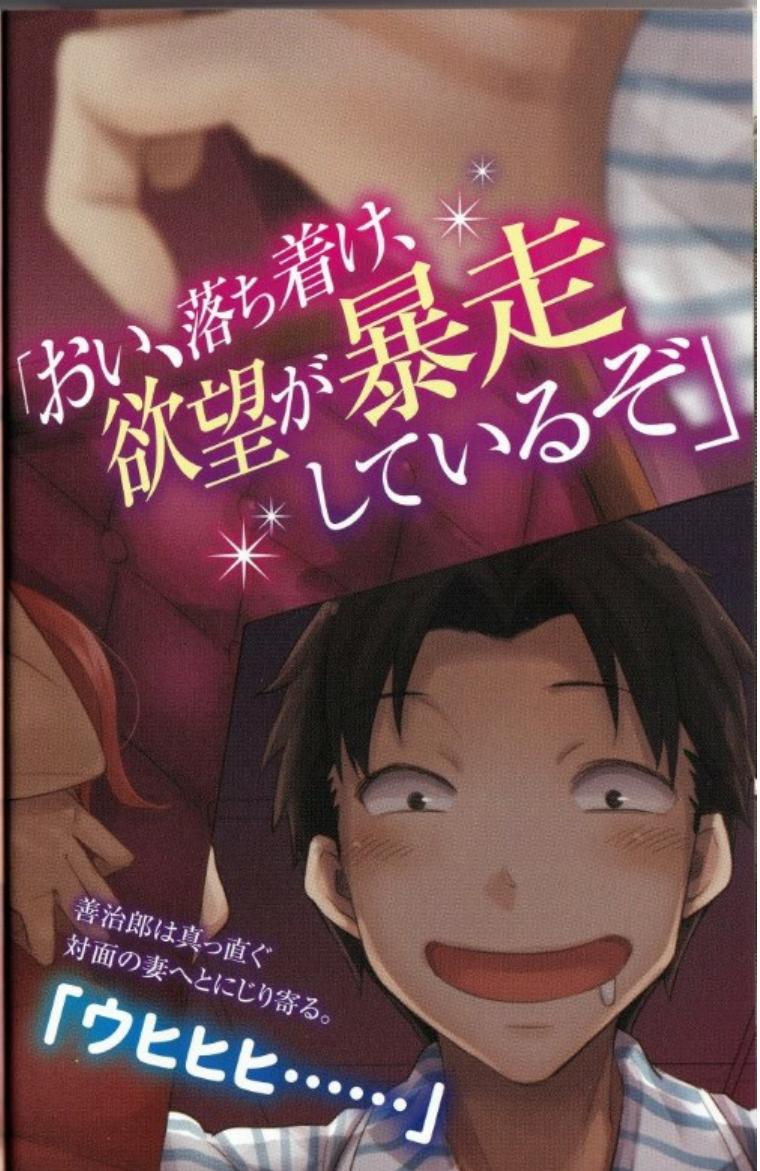
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Illustrations



王都の中央道をいくつもの竜車と
完全武装の兵士が練り歩く。





Prologue: New Year Festival in the Carpa Kingdom

The calendar on the South Continent, including the Carpa Kingdom, was a lunisolar calendar based on the moon phases with a leap month.

Their lunisolar calendar did not have three-hundred and sixty-five days per year, but rather had three-hundred and fifty days as a rule, except for when a leap month was added every four years; then the year had three-hundred and eighty days.

Zenjirou had been used to the solar calendar, so it was extremely confusing to him, when some years lasted a whole month longer.

Anyway, the terminology for the beginning and the ending of a year obviously did exist, since there was a basic parameter for one year, probably a solar year, and the custom to celebrate these days obviously did exist as well.

The New Year Festival in the Carpa Kingdom in particular had a lot in common with the New Year in Japan.

Of course that did not mean that they were ringing a bell in the night of the last day of the year, nor were they eating Soba on New Year's Eve.

Neither did they have the custom to celebrate the first sunrise of the year, nor the custom to visit the shrine first thing in the new year.

Considering all that, it might be a bit of an exaggeration to say that they had a lot in common.

Nevertheless, the general procedure revealed similarities, seeing as they calmly did a major cleaning at the end of the year and then celebrated extensively for three days starting with the New Year's Day.

The end of the year was spent fasting and cleaning.

The first day of the new year was spent lively at home without going out much.

And on the second day, the first big event took place.

The people bought a lot of things on that day, because a myth said that “anything you buy on the second day of the new year will last longer”.

Of course the clever merchants did not miss out on that opportunity. All the merchant houses across the country acknowledged that day as the busiest time of the year and prepared all kind of attractive products.

As a result, all the famous shops in the Capital were obviously crowded with customers on the second day of the new year, but even the stalls on the streets and parks, especially authorized for that day alone, were redundant with customers.

“Table wares! Buy your table wares here! Just look at this wild grain and greasy gloss! It pushes the price a bit, but they will last forever!”

“Miss, if you are looking for textiles, I am the right man. Take a look at this cotton cloth. Despite its firmness, it is not the least bit uncomfortable on the skin. I can guarantee you that it will make great trousers or shirts that will last a long time!”

“Kitchen knives, normal knives or pots! Do not forget to buy your ironware today! After all, today the Space-Time Spirit gives their blessing to us commoners as well! If not buy it now, then when?”

It was nothing special for the coarse street merchants, but even the famous shop owners, who were usually picky about their customers, had staff stand in front of their shop today and let them attracted customers with loud voices.

Just like the advertisement had promoted, a myth of the Carpa Kingdom said that the Space-Time Spirit, which usually was only benevolent to the Royal Family, was giving its blessing to all living things in the Carpa Kingdom on the second day of the New Year. It was the reason why it was said that anything you bought on that day would last longer.

Of course there was nothing to prove it, but with a history of hundreds of years, it was no longer a superstition, but rather a myth. Moreover, the myth was extended in the recent years by saying that the blessing of the Space-Time Spirit should be even stronger in the Capital, where the Royal Family resided,

since the Spirit was their Guardian. That far-stretched rumour sounded so plausible that more and more people came all the way to the Capital on the second day of the New Year, just to do their shopping.

Thanks to that, the economy of the Capital was flourishing, but the soldiers guarding the Capital got the short end of the stick in exchange for it.

"Hey! No fighting on the street! Or do you want to spend the long-awaited New Years in jail!?"

"The street is getting crowded! Stop haggling over the price! The Spirit won't bless the miser!"

"No pushing. No pushing... I SAID NO PUSHING! Stop it or I'll nab ya!"

The leather armoured soldiers were shouting at the top of their lungs while sweating all over.

Trying to hold their temper, the soldiers fended off the pushing crowd with wooden clubs in their hands.

Normally the guards of the Capital would equip a short spear with an iron tip, but they were holding a blunt wooden club just for today.

The usual short spear acted as a "deterrent", but on the day of the first shopping, they needed an utterly "practical" weapon.

Words alone were just not enough for a couple of soldiers to fend off a bustling crowd. So far, the soldiers were just holding the clubs sideways and pushed away the people, but it was not always that harmless. Sometimes they had to resort to using them as the very "impact weapons" they were.

Sellers and buyers alike became hot-blooded during the dealing and fellow customers quarrelled over the same product, claiming stuff like "I touched it first" and "No, it was me", not to forget all the drunkards at daytime, since it was a festive day after all.

It was the job of the soldiers to put these people in their place, yell at them or literally punch some sense into them in the end.

If they were carrying an iron-tipped spear for that, it would not end well for sure.

It was one thing to use it against soldiers of a hostile nation or wild beasts, but flashing sharp metal at merely drunk people of the own country was out of the question.

Thus, they carried a weapon with a relative low power on days like this, where they were bound to make straight use of it.

Having said this, the club was still a proper weapon, even if it had less attack power. It could easily break bones, when swung with all its might, and depending on the spot, it could even end up being fatal.

But that only applied for when a minimum of discipline could no longer be ensured. Otherwise, the Capital was just imbued with a chaotic turmoil today.

“Hi there. We are here to relieve you.”

“Oh, wow. You guys are sweating like crazy. Here, a towel.”

A pair of soldiers, who had fought off the masses, turned around, when they were called upon by their fellow shift workers from behind.

“Oh, that late already?”

“Phew. We somehow made it...”

The well-built soldier in his mid-twenties was sweating to such an extent that it would not be strange to see his whole body give off steam, but he could still maintain a composed facial expression to a certain degree. His partner, a young soldier in his teens, on the other hand could barely stand anymore and looked like he had narrowly escaped death.

The young soldier had relative few muscles for a hard-working combatant and stumbled over to his replacing colleagues like a newborn fawn.

“It’s all yours...”

“Sure thing.”

“You okay? That sounded more like a last will. You better wash off that sweat with some cold water before taking a rest.”

As he no longer had the energy to respond to the joke of his co-worker, the young soldier just nodded once, wrapped the offered towel around his neck

and staggered into the distance like a ghost, all the while keeping his mouth half-opened and a blank look in his eyes.

“Oh God...”

“So that’s how we’ll look after our shift...”

The soldiers from the shift change turned all pale, when the almost soulless appearance of their workmate reminded them of their own fate a few hours later.

“You okay? Here, some water.”

“Yeah... Thanks...”

Relieved from the most arduous task for now, the two soldiers walked down a small alley separated from the main street.

All the people were gathering in the commercial district, so once you got away from there, the Capital became unbelievable desolate and quiet.

The task of standing watch on the congested commercial district was one part of their job. The other part was to patrol the almost deserted living district.

In the forlorn living district occurred as many burglaries as quarrels in the commercial district.

Unfortunately enough, it was the way of the world that some shady characters considered it a “great opportunity for burglary” while everyone was engrossed in the New Year Shopping.

“So, you calmed down a bit?”

“Yes. Thank you. I thought I had been prepared for it, but it seems I was too naïve...”

Finally back on his feet after the consideration of his senior workmate, the young soldier reflected on his gullible resolution.

The other soldier gave his dejected junior a shrewd smirk.

“Well, it’s not your fault. You aren’t even from the Capital. It would be ridiculous to expect you to anticipate this ruckus beforehand. Anyway, you learned now that the Capital Guards are by no means a breezing division.”

"And the hard way, at that..."

The young soldier agreed, using his wooden club as a crutch.

Unlike the other divisions, the Capital Guards Division suffered seldom if ever any casualties. After all, they were entrusted with the mission to guard the Capital, so even if war broke out, they would not be sent to the frontlines, nor would they get dispatched for a dragon subjugation like the soldiers based in the other Royal Domains.

The division dealt with "real battles" least of all, but once a year, they had to go through this pandemonium, so it was not really a convenient division.

And even more so, if you considered the fact that they had to deal with a lot more criminal incidents in the Capital than in the other domains, because of its dense population.

Even without an enemy force, it was so much more work to protect an exceedingly large amount of citizens than to face an unorganised enemy in the field.

Anyway, the two soldiers patrolled the living district of the Capital while their clubs made dull noises every time they touched down onto the cobble-stone pavement.

The noisy touchdown of their clubs as well as their more or less loud conversation were on purpose. They were drawing attention to the fact that the "Capital Guards were patrolling", prompting any potential criminals, who were up to no good, to behave themselves.

Under that pretext, the soldiers casually chatted with each other.

"I've gotta say, it's rather chilly now. Back there, it was as stuffy as during the hottest season."

The young soldier had almost choked from the sultriness in the commercial district, so he took a deep breath once again and spoke slowly in order to savour the fresh air.

"Well, we're already in the 'Vibrant Season'. I would be damned if it were still hot."

The senior soldier shrugged his shoulders a bit and replied like that.

Unlike Japan, the Carpa Kingdom divided the year into three major seasons, namely the “Rainy Season”, the “Hottest Season” and the “Vibrant Season”.

Based on the seasons in Japan, the “Rainy Season” would be Spring, the “Hottest Season” Summer and the “Vibrant Season” Fall and Winter alike.

In other words, the “Vibrant Season” covered half a year. The first part of it, namely the Fall equivalent, was “a bit hot, but not a hindrance to work”, whereas the last part, namely the Winter equivalent, was chilly in the morning as well as in the evening and mild during the day, so it was the most comfortable season of the year.

“True enough, but you tend to forget the seasons in there.”

“Yeah. That crowd really makes you feel like the Hottest Season has come around again.”

When the soldier in his teens said so in a weary tone, the soldier in his twenties agreed with a wry smile.

Although the people of the Carpa Kingdom were used to the heat of the Hottest Season, they apparently could not stand the heat generated by a dense crowd of people.

“The event only comes once a year. You can’t really tell them to restrain themselves.”

“Duh. If possible, I would have taken part, too. But I know what you mean.”

“Wait, you are after something?”

“Well, you might say that.”

It had been a casual question, but the young soldier flushed his cheek and averted his gaze in response.

The other soldier seemed to have an idea and showed a somewhat sly smirk.

“Oho, let me guess: A present for a girl. Right?”

He jerkily bumped the younger workmate with his right elbow.

The younger soldier apparently resigned himself to the fact that he was not

able to avoid giving an answer, so he looked down with his cheeks still flushed
“Yes. I want a ring for my lover in the countryside... If possible, a bronze one.”
and obediently admitted it.

Bronze was an alloy from copper and tin. Depending on the mixture ratio of the copper and tin, the bronze could have a brown, golden or silver colour.

Since the metal was cheaper than gold or silver, it was popular amongst commoners to be used for accessories like rings or bracelets.

Nevertheless, it was quite an expensive item for the still young soldier and not something you bought to simply impress a girl you fancied.

Instead, it was much more a present for an important person with whom you were going to share a future. Realising that, the soldier did no stop the questioning of his junior.

“You mean matching rings? You know, these ‘Wedding Rings’ that are common talk right now.”

Zenjirou had given Aura a Wedding Ring. That custom had spread throughout the Kingdom at an alarming speed in the past two years. The purveyor to the court, who had access to the Inner Palace, where Zenjirou lived, had deliberately passed on that information.

A first-rate merchant would never miss out on such a profitable opportunity.

And as expected, even commoners with enough saving, not just nobility, had picked up the custom of “Wedding Rings” as of late.

Apparently the young soldier was also one of the people, who were eagerly accepting that new custom.

“Yes. I can’t afford anything fancy with my savings, but I should be able to buy two of them, if I count every penny. Besides, they really add to a proposal.”

When the young soldier said this with his typical for a citizen of the Carpa Kingdom dark-skinned face bright red, even the other soldier nodded heartily.

“Yeah, that’s for sure. I would have had it so much easier, if I had something like that back in my days.”

The man was apparently already married and showed a bitter smile, as he remembered how he had asked for the hand in marriage of his now wife.

It was definitely more reassuring to have pair rings for a proposal than to do it empty-handed.

Seen in this way, it was a “reliable weapon” for the proposing man and the proposed woman would not be averse to get a ring as a present, either. Needless to say, the craftsmen or merchant selling the rings were delighted, too. Everyone profited from the custom.

“Certainly. The story of the Wedding Rings has reached my home village, too, so she should know what I want, when I give her the ring by just saying ‘Please accept this’.

I mean, it’s way easier to say ‘Please accept this’ than ‘Please marry me’.”

“Just be careful that she doesn’t mistake it for a simple present, though.”

The senior soldier threw cold water on the passionate speech of his junior, but at heart, he was convinced that it was not possible to imagine a Carpa Kingdom without the custom of “Wedding Rings” in the future.

*

The second day of the New Year was celebrated during the day with the “First Shopping”, whereas the end of the day was celebrated with the “Night Festival”.

The people brought out lights and lightened up the night streets to the utmost, as if to assist the small waxing crescent moon, which finally started to regain its brightness, from the ground.

That obviously applied to the commercial district, which had been crowded with people, since the morning for the “First Shopping” on the second day of the New Year, but all the other districts such as the living district, the craftsmen district or even the shanty town, where nobody but the residents ever went to, were also illuminated with countless fires, banishing the night.

If you could look down on the Capital from above now, you would see that the whole town was illuminated like an excessively decorated Christmas tree.

The brightest spot amongst all was the front yard of the Royal Palace.

Just for tonight, the yard was opened to the commoners and many residents of the Capital were swarming to the place.

Although it was opened to the public, it was still the Royal Palace. An hustle and bustle like in the commercial district was not allowed and the gathered people were behaving themselves under the watch of the Royal Household Guards.

The Carpa Kingdom mainly used oil pans or lantern with fluid vegetable oil as a general light source, but right now, the front yard of the Royal Palace was illuminated by “candles” held up by the gathered crowd.

Compared to the vegetable oil, candles were a lot more expensive, but were all the more safer, because they were a solid fuel.

Due to that, it was mandatory to buy a candle at the entrance, if you wanted to participate in the “Night of Flame Festival” of the second day of the New Year in the front yard of the Royal Palace.

Even if it was only an investment once per year, it still could only be afforded by people with a certain flexibility in their finances.

Consequently, all the people gathering in the front yard were from relatively wealthy families in the Capital.

The front yard was illuminated by countless flames lit by countless people.

Zenjirou witness that scenery from atop the balcony on the second floor of the Royal Palace together with his wife Aura.

“Wow...”

When her husband from a different world breathed this utterance of admiration, the Queen put on a smile and said proudly.

“I know, right? It is like a starry sky on the ground. I am looking forward to this sight every year fraught with tension.”

Numerous people held up numerous lit candles.

There was no regularity in the point of lights, because they were not arranged

beautifully, but just like Aura had said, it showcased the same unconstrained beauty as the starry sky.

"Yes, it is truly beautiful. Quite the privilege we have here."

Considerate to his surroundings, Zenjirou replied affirmative to Aura with an humble tone while his gaze was clued on the starry sky imitation on the ground. It was no flattery or courtesy. He was truly fascinated by the sight below from the bottom of his heart.

It was indeed appropriate to call it a "privilege".

There was no law that forbid to watch the "Night of Flame Festival" from above, but as a matter of fact, the balcony on the second floor of the Royal Palace was the only place in range from where you could oversee the front yard from above.

Sitting next to the Queen on these special seats on the balcony and looking down on the countless lights below, gave him the worrisome illusion that the gathered crowd was worshipping them.

The countless lights banished the night and illuminated the Capital like during the day.

It was passed down that the year had more daytime and less night-time, when the night was displaced by the "Night of Flame Festival" like this.

In this world, the terms "daytime" and "night-time" were not just referring to the time, when the sun or moon were out.

The daytime was seen as the time of prosperity and the night-time as the time of misery. It brought good luck to the year, when they fought against the symbol of absolute negativity, namely the night, with as much light as possible and acquired a prosperousness in form of the sunrise.

(Technically, I'm seeing this for the second time, but I've no recollection of the event from last year...)

Experiencing his second New Year after coming into this world, Zenjirou was puzzled at heart.

But he soon hit upon the reason after a bit of pondering.

(Oh, right. Last year, I was still too flustered to recognize this sight as "beautiful".)

Unless there was a solid reason, royalty absolutely had to attend the "Night of Flame Festival" on the second day of the New Year. The official event was that important.

Last year around this time, Aura had been pregnant with the Crown Prince.

Zenjirou had been worried about his pregnant wife and attended a major event of the country for the first time, so it was no surprise that he did not have the leisure to enjoy the festival.

Right now, he was not wearing the third formal attire, which he had gotten relatively comfortable with lately, but rather the first formal attire, which he had only worn a handful of time so far.

A turban was completely wrapped around his head and was held together by an accessory similar to a crown, heavier and more pompous than a brooch could ever be.

The first formal attire had a lot of ornaments and golden threads worked into it in all places, so his whole body was shining brightly as the flame from candle stand next to him illuminated it.

It worked for Aura, since she was a beauty to begin with, but to Zenjirou it only looked comical and degrading instead, when a boring guy like him was dressed up with these ornaments. That might just be his Japanese value judgment preserving, though.

Queen Aura seemed to sense his gaze on her, when Zenjirou looked at his wife sitting next to him, so she turned to him and gave him a smile.

Needless to say, Aura was wearing her first formal attire as the Queen as well. As a rule, she often wore a dress-like attire that had been introduced by the North Continent, but her formal attire was the traditional dress of the Carpa Kingdom, similar to the clothes of the people of South-East Asia.

The crimson cloth was wrapping around her body gracefully and had even more ornaments than the clothes from Zenjirou. Unlike him, she looked as radiant as the jewels on her clothes, though.

Her appearance was so stunning and elegant that you were under the illusion that Aura herself was causing the glistening brilliance that actually came from the flame. It was the authentic embodiment of the notion called Queen.

The Queen noticed that her husband was looking at her with semi-closed eyes as if dazzled, and happily intensified her smile.

Through an upright effort, Aura had lost the extra kilos from her pregnancy with Prince Carlos and finally regained her initial weight as of late.

It was truly refreshing that she could proudly hold the gaze of her husband again without feeling startled.

The main reason they had refrained from making a second prince so far had been the fact that she could not afford to delay the state affairs due to continuous pregnancies. That much was true, but she could not deny either that a part of her had been “reluctant to completely reveal her fleshed out body” to him.

(My weight is back to normal and Carlos is already two years old. It might be time to consider a second child for real soon.)

Aura averted his eyes from her husband and looked down on the starry night sky of candles below the balcony while she harboured such a sentiment.

By the way, their child Carlos Zenkichi was not present here, as it was expected. According to the counting method of the Carpa Kingdom, Prince Carlos was already two years old, but going by the conventional counting method, he was still an infant under the age of one. To be precise, he was about seven months old.

That difference came into existence because their counting method set the age to one at birth and added one year on each New Year instead of the birthday, whereas the conventional counting method set the age to zero at birth and added one year on each birthday.

That discrepancy was especially harming in the early years. It made little difference whether you were twenty-seven or twenty-nine years old, but it made a world of difference whether you were thirteen or fifteen years old. And it was practically comparing apples to oranges, when you were either under the

age of one or two years old, like Carlos right now.

Anyway, it was by no means wrong of Aura to seriously consider a second child soon.

Even if they were to start trying tonight, it would take at least nine month in the best case until the child was born.

In other words, Carlos and the second prince would have an age difference of one and half year according to the conventional counting method, or a one to two year difference according to their counting method.

It was not really a bad timing for the Queen to have a second child. And considering the fact that more inheritors of the “bloodline magic” meant more influence in this world, it did no harm to have a lot of children.

It always came at the risk of causing problems with the line of succession, though.

“.....”

“.....?”

Zenjirou cocked his head puzzled for a moment, when he sensed an overtone and sex appeal in the smile of his wife, but they were in the middle of the “Night of Flame Festival” right now. A little private chat might still be tolerated, but they certainly could not afford to ignore their surroundings and immerse themselves in a lengthy conversation.

“.....”

“.....”

And then, the Queen and her Prince Consort silently kept watching the countless flames of the citizens gathered in the front yard until the sun dawned in the eastern sky.

Chapter 01: The Marriage of the General

The “Vibrant Season” was the equivalent to Fall and Winter in Japan. This season covered half of the year and like its name implied, it was the most vibrant season of the year.

During this season, the people on the South Continent worked busily as if to make up for the lost time they had spent quietly inside the house during the “Hottest Season”, where just standing in the sunlight could make you faint, or the “Rainy Season”, where it rained at least once per three days.

The previous war had also mainly been waged during the six months of the “Vibrant Season”. There had been a few skirmishes in the “Hottest Season” and “Rainy Season”, but otherwise it had generally been a ceasefire during these two seasons.

The same applied for the peaceful times.

Of course some merchants considered it a good opportunity to do business, when everyone else was not working, and natural disasters or dragon attacks paid no mind to the circumstances of humans, so the activities during the “Hottest Season” and “Rainy Season” never really came to a dead stop.

But it was only natural to wait with any activities that could be postponed due to these circumstances, until the Vibrant Season.

The best example for such an activity was a “Marriage Ceremony”.

It goes without saying that a “Marriage Ceremony” was a major event for the wedding couple, but for their families it was just the same.

Especially for weddings, where the family business was inherited, be it nobility or commoners. All related parties gathered from all over the country, celebrated the marriage and familiarized themselves with the new family members.

That involved a long travel, so it was practically a matter of course to hold the ceremony during the comfortable “Vibrant Season”.

Going by that logic, the marriage of Zenjirou and Aura had been an exception, since it had been held during the “Hottest Season”.

Due to these circumstances, there were a lot of marriage ceremonies during the Vibrant Season.

And it was not really irrelevant to Queen Aura, when a marriage ceremony was held.

After all, the law in the kingdom stated that the tieing between high ranking nobility required the permission of the Monarch.

In most cases, her secretary prepared the necessary documents and Aura just put her sign on it, but even that could get tedious, when there were a lot of documents to sign. Moreover, she personally had to write up something like a “Wedding Wish” for when it concerned important nobles.

Sometimes the Royal Family was even expected to give money as a Wedding Gift. It could turn out to be a worrying task to set an amount for that, because lavishness was not an option, but at the same time, it had to be enough so as not to shame the Royal Family.

Nevertheless, that minutely treatment was still better than the worst case, whereof two existed.

The first being a marriage between nobles so high ranking that Royalty themselves had to attend the ceremony.

The other being a marriage between nobility so influential that it could not be permitted so easily.

And right now, Aura was looking at the worst possible request for a marriage that combined both of the above mentioned conditions.

The request concerned Puyol Guillén, the current head of the Guillén Family, and the eldest daughter of the Guzzle Family.

Queen Aura sat on the couch in her office with that document in hand and looked at the two men sitting on the couch across from her.

The men in question were Puyol Guillén and Xavier Guzzle.

Even seated, the giant General was as tall as a standing petite woman and the

young successor to the March was somewhat small for a man.

That height difference was not the only contrast between them. General Puyol was assuming an air of confidence to the point of calling him “brazen”, whereas Xavier next to him was straining every nerve, so that his tension was recognizable at a glance.

The Queen smiled at heart, when she saw the fledgling noble so flustered, but showed not the slightest hint of it on the surface while she deliberately spoke with a voice free from emotion.

“Welcome, General Puyol, Sir Xavier. Let us get straight to the point.

I am holding the marriage request for Lady Lucinda and you here, General. Is that in compliance with both families?”

“Yes.”

“That is correct. I, Xavier Guzzle, testify that on behalf on my father, the head of the Guzzle Family.”

The general answered Aura with a composed tone. Following that, Xavier also answered, but with a tone that did not conceal all of his tension.

Aura nodded a bit affected, then continued.

“Okay. Very well.

So you are getting married, General. It definitely is desirable for the kingdom as well, when the head of the Guillén Family gets married.”

“Thank you for your understanding, Your Majesty.”

It was perfectly in accordance with the etiquette, when General Puyol put his clenched right hand against his left shoulder and lowered his head while seated.

But even so, the giant soldier only gave off the impression that he was “brazen”.

It must surely be in his nature. Aura once again gave the appearance of being inexpressive in order to conceal her dissatisfaction and inquired further.

“And your partner will be Lady Lucinda from the Guzzle Family. Seeing as Sir Xavier is here, I guess it is related to the earlier Pack Dragon Subjugation?”

General Puyol displayed a brazen smile and Xavier shivered nervously in reaction to the words from the Queen.

"Indeed. During this incident, I had the chance to acquaint myself with Sir Xavier here. Since he went to the Capital for a report later on, I took it upon myself to bring his men home to the March of Guzzle."

"Right. The General has been a big help back then!"

After General Puyol explained so without ruffle or excitement, Xavier expressed his gratitude to him with a tone so vivid it could be called ingenious.

The Pack Dragon Subjugation took place on the Salt Road of the Carpa Kingdom last year. In the end, the incident was resolved at the seaport city Valentia, far away from the Salt Road.

Xavier Guzzle had originally been put in charge, but due to turns and twists, he had to leave his troops for a different mission, so General Puyol took it upon himself to lead the troops from Xavier back to the March of Guzzle.

A general of the Royal Army had been entrusted with the soldiers from a feudal lord, so it was unthinkable that he would leave right after bringing the men back to the border of the domain.

His responsibilities entailed that he led them all the way to the mansion of the feudal lord (in case of the border region, it was more like a fortress than a mansion), consigned the command to the person in charge there and waited for the troops of the domain to disarm.

It was perfectly normal that General Puyol would get acquainted with Lucinda Guzzle on that occasion.

Aura equally looked at both men sitting across from her while she once more recalled the information about Lucinda Guzzle she had looked into beforehand, in her head.

(Lucinda Guzzle is the oldest daughter of the Guzzle Family. She made a name for herself as a warrioress, when she assumed the role of the proxy lord in place of her elder brother during the previous war while her father was away, and took care of the domain and her baby brother.

But in exchange, she wasted her prime time and is still unmarried. I can relate a bit.)

The most suitable age for a woman to get married in this world was from around fifteen to twenty years old. Going by the standards of a modern Japanese like Zenjirou, it meant that a girl at the age of thirteen to fourteen would be “nubile” and a girl at the age of nineteen to twenty would be “past her prime of life”,

since they were calculating the age differently here.

Yet Lucinda Guzzle had wasted that important time span to protect her family from the turmoil of war.

She was already twenty-five years old, so she had long passed her golden age and counted as a middle-aged woman. Her age made it almost impossible to find a suitable family to marry into, even with the powerful backing of her family.

“Have you discussed it with Marquis Guzzle already?”

So just in case, Aura asked that, but she more or less knew what they were going to say.

“Yes, the Marquis has fortunately given us his blessings, too. Sir Xavier is even jumping the gun and calling me ‘Brother-in-law’ already.”

“B-Brother-in-law! You are not supposed to mention that in front of Her Majesty!”

General Puyol replied as expected and Xavier Guzzle exclaimed in panic.

Aura heaved a sigh at heart in response to that.

It was not difficult to imagine how great of a worrisome topic the marriage of his eldest daughter was for Marquis Guzzle.

After all, his daughter missed out on her chance to marry, because he went to war and abandoned his domain. Her younger brother Xavier must have felt guilty, too, since she had assumed the mother role during that time.

And now, General Puyol had proposed to her.

Xavier was still too young and innocent to understand it, but Marquis Guzzle should be well aware of the intentions the general had.

When the Guillén and Guzzle Families were to be tied together through this marriage, General Puyol might get to incorporate the fortune and military strength of the Guzzle Family into his own. That ulterior motive was more than obvious, but every noble had more or less that kind of ambition.

No marriage would ever be achieved, if every single ambition like that was cut off.

Besides, it was by no means such a bad deal for the Guzzle Family to team up with the Guillén Family. As prominent nobles of the border region, the Guzzle Family was known for its fortune and military strength, but they had few connections to the heartland. The Guillén Family on the other hand had a lot of authority in the heartland.

(For that reason, I would normally never allow such a marriage, though.)

The nobility of the heartland with a lot of influence in politics and the nobility of the border region with a self-governing domain would team up by the means of marriage. It goes without saying how much of a threat to the Royal Family it was.

In the future, that marriage might bring out an even more influential power within the Kingdom than the Royal Family.

Having said all this, it proved to be very difficult to stop the marriage this time. Aware of that, Aura smiled to the best of her ability as she answered.

"Hahaha, now that is what I call rushing your fences. But Lady Lucinda was raised in the borderland. She might not be able to accustom to the life in the Capital."

"No worries about that. She has told me that she would go anywhere as long as she is with me. The men in our country must be blind, when a woman like her can stay unmarried for so long."

"Bro— I mean, General Puyol, you honour the efforts of my sister so far by saying this."

Xavier was plainly speaking from joy, but the words from General Puyol were a declaration that even the bride herself had given her consent.

The Queen kept smiling, but her cheek twitched.

"Oho? Lovestruck already? That will not do. We cannot have the important general of our Royal Army getting his teeth out of him. Guess I will have to make a heartless decision here for the general welfare."

It was nothing but a playful "pickoff attempt", but a certain young man was too tense in body and soul to catch that obvious nuance.

"Y-Your Majesty! Please take my latest achievement as the price for your permission then!"

In response to the reckless utterance from the overhasty young man, the giant general displayed a bitter expression that seemed to say "Oh no" for a moment. It goes without saying that it was quite difficult to talk your way out of something you had claimed in front of the Queen.

Even more so, when the Queen herself would not give you such a chance to begin with.

For the first time today, the Queen registered a weak spot and intensified her smile a bit.

"Oh? I hope you do realize what you just said?"

She followed up on it with a threatening remark.

"Y-Yes."

Xavier agreed knee-jerk, but her question could not really be denied now anyway.

Paying for the marriage permission with a military achievement. Taken by itself, it was nothing uncommon.

The problem this time round was that it meant that the supposed reward for his military achievement would not have to be paid.

For the Pack Dragon Subjugation Xavier Guzzle himself had led an army from the March of Guzzle. The soldiers received a wage, the food for the soldiers and

dragons did cost money and so did the depleted arrows and broken equipment. And although they were only a handful of them, the families of the fallen soldiers needed to be reimbursed as well.

Normally all these expenses could be added on to the “reward” paid by the Royal Family.

But in this case, where the “achievement was used as the price for the marriage permission”, they were obviously not paid a single coin.

That kind of money admittedly meant no financial ruin for a wealthy family like the Guzzle Family, but it was still a burden, when they had to pay the whole sum all at once.

(There is no way the successor to the family name can make a decision about the reward money all by himself. That means, Marquis Guzzle must have already given his approval. So they are that desperate to marry Lucinda off, eh.)

If she were to forcefully crush this marriage, she would not only get on bad terms with General Puyol, but also with the Guzzle Family.

Reasoning like that, Aura realized that there was no way to prevent this marriage.

In that case, she ought to make the best of allowing this marriage for the Royal Family. After Aura had asked him again, she heaved an affected sigh with a stern face, then proclaimed to the giant general and young successor to the March.

“...Fine. If you are willing to go that far, I shall not be an heartless monster, either.

In light of Sir Xavier’s consideration for his sister, I will allow the marriage between Puyol Guillén and Lucinda Guzzle by way of exemption.”

“Th-Thank you very much, Your Majesty!”

Xavier almost jumped off the couch in his effusive delight, whereupon Aura gave him a blank look for a moment, but then she shifted her gaze back to General Puyol.

“Well, it is also my fault that you have stayed single until today. I am

complying with your wish as an exception to the exception here, but it also allows me to finally clear my conscience towards you, when you have found a partner.”

She casually added that.

General Puyol was the current head of the famous Guillén Family, but even after more than thirty years, he was still single. The only reason for that was that he had been a marriage candidate for the Queen. Due to that, Aura had been in a bad position to refuse his marriage request to begin with.

By emphasizing on the fact that it was an exception to the exception, she was indirectly saying that she “compensated him for leaving him in abeyance all these years, by allowing this marriage, and that they were even with each other now”.

She was going to push the financial burden of the Pack Dragon Subjugation onto the Guzzle Family and clear off the debt to the Guillén Family for restricting General Puyol all this time.

By doing so, she could squeeze at least a little profit for the Royal Family from the marriage between two prominent families, since it was difficult to prevent it altogether.

Aura had racked her brain over this and while the young Xavier might accept it, General Puyol was not the kind of man to surrender this without a fight.

“Yes, I am most grateful for your exceeding kindness, Your Majesty. Following this, I would like to issue the invitation to our marriage ceremony in the March of Guzzle.

I know you are busy, so I will not go as far as to ask you to come in person, but there would be no greater honour, if you could favour us with your congratulations on the special day.”

Aura raised an eyebrow in response to the words of General Puyol.

“Oh? ...You are holding the ceremony in the March?”

Xavier failed to noticed the subtle change in Aura and burst out happily.

“My father and sister said the Capital would be just fine, but General Puyol

insisted on holding the ceremony in our domain. Thanks to him, my sister will make a final nice memory at home!"

In the Carpa Kingdom, it was the custom to hold the marriage ceremony at the home area of the family the marriage partner effectively left. Meaning: At the home of the wife, when she married into the man's family, or at the home of the husband, when he married into the woman's family.

Since marrying into a different family meant that "you cut all ties with your birthplace and became a member of the other family", the custom signified that you get to have one final memory in your home.

Having said this, it was nothing but a general principle and there were plenty of exceptions.

Especially in cases like this one, where one partner hailed from the Capital, it was not all that unusual to choose the Capital for the ceremony regardless of the family situation.

On second thought, the Capital was certainly a better place to accommodate the guests than a domain in the borderland, and the Guzzle Family could use the ceremony as an excuse to go sight-seeing in the Capital, so it would be by no means a bad idea.

Despite that, General Puyol was going to hold the ceremony in the March of Guzzle instead of his birthplace, the Capital. Needless to say, there was a reason behind it.

And Aura immediately discerned his reasoning.

(In my position, I cannot afford to leave it at mere congratulations for his marriage ceremony. I would at least have to send a representative, or worse, attend it myself.)

General Puyol was a former marriage candidate for Aura. If she were to respond to the marriage of her former marriage candidate with only the bare necessities, it was more than likely that a rumour would spread, saying that she was still "emotionally attached" to him.

That would definitely be bad news. When a man took an interest in other women than his wife, he was called "authentic", but when a woman was

making eyes at other men than her husband, she was called an “adulterer” and there was no greater scandal than that.

Aura knew that and General Puyol knew that, too, of course, so he had chosen the March for the marriage ceremony.

(In other words, I have no other choice but to either attend it myself or ask my husband to go in my stead.)

It made no difference whether Aura herself went there and gave them her blessing or she sent Zenjirou there to give the blessing in her stead, when she wanted to avoid a scandal. In short, they just needed to give the appearance that Aura and Zenjirou congratulated the general on his marriage from the bottom of their hearts. Either royalty would go all the way to the borderland especially for his marriage ceremony. That fact gave General Puyol the perfect “prestige”.

And that was surely what he was after.

Aura had two choices. But in effect, she could not afford to leave the Capital for long as the Queen. So she basically only had one choice left.

(I will have to impose on my husband yet again.)

She grew desperate at heart, because she kept breaking her promises to him lately, but replied to General Puyol in order to squeeze even the tiniest bit of profit from this matter.

“I see. You are quite the virtuous man, General. Of course Royalty cannot be absent at the marriage ceremony of the general we entrust the safety of our country to.

Unfortunately, both my husband and I are extremely busy. As you may know, we are currently hosting three members of the Royal Families from two countries in our Kingdom.”

Prince Francesco and Princess Bona from the Twin Kingdom were obviously already here, but Princess Freya from the Uppsala Kingdom would come to the Capital soon, too.

Aura had wanted to keep her in Valentia and finalize the intercontinental

trade negotiations for just the Royal Family, but that turned out to be impossible. After all, the female warrior under the command of Princess Freya had defeated the leading Huge Pack Dragon in the earlier Pack Dragon Subjugation.

Moreover, her achievement had already gotten around to the point that even the Capital was singing the praise of it.

With so much publicity, Aura could not afford not to invite them to the Capital for a reward in her role as the Queen of the Carpa Kingdom.

According to the schedule, Princess Freya would arrive with her retainers in the Capital in the next few days. Rumours were saying that they were going to enter the Capital with the skull of the Huge Pack Dragon on display, so the castle town was coming level with a festival.

"For that reason, we both have no time to spare. It would be a different matter, though, if the next 'budget meeting' comes to an end early."

"I see..."

This time it was General Puyol's turn to fall silent with a stern expression.

Her intention was not that difficult to understand.

She was saying that he ought to "approve her budget proposal in the next meeting, when he wanted either royalty to attend his weeding".

The next budget meeting was dealing with the question, wherfrom they should compensate the accrued cost for the recent Pack Dragon Subjugation.

The finances of the Carpa Kingdom were hardly in any shape to have something to spare, even less when you took the previous war into consideration. So whenever unexpected expenses arose, one department would have to absorb the losses and that very department would strongly object to it.

When Aura enforced a decision, the affected department would obviously be angry at Aura, but if General Puyol were to stand up for her, that anger would mainly be directed at him.

To put it bluntly: She proposed that General Puyol should take the blame she

was originally supposed to take.

However, it was not a bad deal for General Puyol, either.

He never really concealed his strong ambitions, so he had a lot of enemies. It would make no real difference, when he earned a bit of resentment on top of it now. On the contrary, he might actually rise in the esteem of the military, if word got around that he was willing to “earn the resentment from other nobles in order to secure the budget for the Royal Army”.

Once General Puyol quickly finished calculating the pros and cons in his head, “Understood. If that is the case, I am more than willing to lend a hand.” he gave his consent.

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After Puyol Guillén and Xavier Guzzle had left her office, the Queen called out to her trusted retainer, who had silently stood at attention behind her so far.

“Fabio. You saw what happened. Tell me your opinion without reserve.”

The middle-aged secretary put his right hand against his small chin and spoke to the Queen after a moment of thinking.

“Okay. Long story short, you are going to send Master Zenjirou as your representative to the marriage ceremony between General Puyol and Lady Lucinda. In exchange for that prestige, General Puyol will wholly support you in the upcoming meeting.”

“Exactly.”

Narrowing his eyes to slits as if laughing with just his eyes, the middle-aged secretary nodded short and replied.

“Seems alright to me. It was pretty much a given that General Puyol would get his way in one way or another, since the Royal Family was at a clear disadvantage in regards to his marriage to begin with. Taking that into consideration, you still managed to clear the debt to General Puyol and averted the outstanding reward for the Guzzle Family from the previous Pack Dragon Subjugation, by allowing the marriage.”

I would say the profit from the deal is satisfactory for the Royal Family.”

“I see.”

The Queen relaxed her shoulders in light of his assessment. But her secretary continued snappish as if to throw cold water on her hope.

“Well, Master Zenjirou is coming out on the short end, though. But that should prove to be no problem, either. He would never refuse such a well thought out deal.

He requires no wage and listens to everything you tell him. And above all, he would never dare to betray you. I doubt you could find a more faithful ‘pawn’ than him. You made quite the catch there, Your Majesty.”

“!?”

On the receiving end of his irony, Aura almost lost control, when she slammed her right hand onto the table while bending over, but she pulled herself together in the next moment.

“...Are you saying I am treating my husband like a convenient chess piece?”

Aura placed her bottom back onto the chair with a sigh and asked her retainer in a somewhat feeble tone.

“If I may be frank: Yes, I cannot see it any other way, when I look at your recent treatment of him.”

“I see...”

Aura heaved another deep sigh in response to the words from Secretary Fabio.

“.....”

Leaning back in her chair, Aura shut her eyes tightly and shook her head unruly a few times.

The reason she lost her temper and even sung small afterwards was precisely because it had rang a bell with her.

Lately, she had taken it for granted that she could entrust trivial matters to Zenjirou without a problem.

The Queen shuddered all too late in light of her altered train of thought, which “naturally” assumed that her husband was going to obey her unconditionally.

But the slender-faced secretary added indifferently, when he saw his master like this.

“Is something the matter? If I may say so, Master Zenjirou is not really offended by your one-sided distribution of work. So you are just feeling guilty on your own and that is not only meaningless, but also ridiculous.”

“You are as blunt as ever...”

The Queen gave her subordinate secretary a mixed look of anger and bitterness, but did not feel like forbidding him to speak.

To begin with, this man was her trusted retainer precisely because he could give tongue to painful fact like this.

Still, Aura did not take his whole statement at face value.

After rolling shoulders extensively and taking a deep breath, the Queen objected with a resolute face.

“You do have a point, but it is a fact that I am relying on my husband. And unless I admit to it, the reliance will only go out of hand.”

“A praiseworthy mindset, indeed. But you two are a married couple. I dare to say it is also unnatural, when the wife does not rely on her husband at all. Right now, you are constricting yourself a bit too much, which makes the whole situation unnatural instead.”

“Hmm...”

Being told that, Aura was at a loss for words. It certainly was not good for the relationship of a married couple, when they only made allowances for each other all the time.

As a matter of fact, Aura was somewhat annoyed by the lack of desire in Zenjirou. It admittedly was quite laudable to not cause trouble for others to the best of your ability, but when it started to concern people of your family, it gave off the impression of being “distant”.

The middle-aged secretary kept an inexpressive mask on his slender face while he warned the pondering Queen.

“Having said this, your worry that Master Zenjirou might get upset, might not necessarily be unfounded this time round.

After all he will need to take a different partner, when he attends the marriage ceremony without you.”

“Y-Yeah. You are right.”

The Queen contorted her face, when the pointer of her retainer hit the bullseye.

In the Carpa Kingdom it was common practice for an adult to attend a wedding ceremony with a partner of the other sex.

A married man would just take his wife with him and all was well, and when his wife was tied up with matters, he would ask a female relative. On the other hand, it was generally considered a confession of love, when an unmarried man asked someone to be his partner for the wedding ceremony.

Zenjirou was married alright, but he was going as the “representative of Aura” this time, so his wife could not accompany him as his partner.

As a consequence, Zenjirou needed to ask a different woman to be his partner. The chosen woman would then be seen as the leading candidate for a concubine without doubt.

The other matters aside for now, Aura was certainly reluctant to tell Zenjirou about this particularity, seeing as he was taking an obvious adverse stance on accepting a concubine.

“Oh well. I will be pushing my luck, but I guess I will ask Beldam Pascuala to accompany him.”

Pascuala was the wife of the Royal Archmage Espiridión and an old woman at the age of almost seventy years.

If an married old woman were to be his partner, she would hardly been seen as a future concubine candidate.

“Will the other nobles really put up with that? I mean, it is the perfect

opportunity for them.”

“Probably not. We will have to push it through with some kind of specious story. And if that should fail... he really will get a concubine this time round. I just hope my husband will somehow accept it.”

Aura heaved a gloomy sigh.

The slender-faced secretary spoke a bit amused, when he saw his master depressed.

“Your Majesty really turns into a coward, when it comes to your husband. I have known you for a long time, so this is a refreshing sight.”

“Silence!”

Aura raised her voice as expected and glared at her trusted retainer.

But as a matter of fact, she herself acknowledged that she acted like a coward, when it involved Zenjirou. He was giving her a pure and completely untarnished love, so she unconsciously felt a strong aversion to taint that love even a little bit.

Sitting in her chair, Aura closed her eyes and tapped the surface of her desk with the index finger of her right hand resting on the table while she mused.

“...Still, I have no other option, but to send my husband as my representative. I guess I will have to have a heart to heart talk with him.”

“I believe that is the right decision. Even in the unlikely event that Master Zenjirou will be offended by it, he fortunately will receive something that lifts his spirits in a few days.”

“Oh, right.”

Suddenly, Aura’s facial expression took a change for the better.

That something to lift his spirits was nothing else but the ‘goats’ from Princess Freya.

The goats itself had been a present from Princess Freya for the birth celebration of Prince Carlos, but they would obviously occasion expenditure.

After all, they were the first mammal livestock in the Carpa Kingdom.

The goats needed an enclosure in the Royal Palace, the greenstuff needed to be cultivated for their food and people needed to be trained to take care of the goats.

All of this required a not insignificant amount of money.

Since the goats were not all that picky about the food and had a sturdy build, it was relatively easy to take care of them, but the people of the Carpa Kingdom had no experience with mammals down to the present day, so it was hardly a simple task.

By way of comparison: It was like asking a Modern Japanese milk farmer to raise iguanas now.

There was no other way but to rely on the subordinates of Princess Freya for everything in the beginning. And her subordinates would surely not lend a hand for free, either.

It was a troublesome undertaking that took time and money. Moreover, it was actually superfluous. Frankly speaking, Zenjirou was “having his way” with this project.

“It is kind of troublesome that the reception of Princess Freya coincides with the reception of the triumphal female warrior, who defeated the Huge Pack Dragon, but it is not really unfeasible. It will be a bit bothersome, but it is for the sake of my husband after all.”

Mentioning how much of a pain all this was, Aura was showing an unbefitting smile despite all that. After all, her husband had been selfish for the first time after never breathing a wish all this time. She could not help but feel extremely happy about granting him that wish.

Her secretary said a bit sarcastic, when he saw his master like that.

“You look like an overly doting grandmother that gets all excited about choosing a present for her first grandchild.”

“...Can you not say mother at least?”

The reproachful voice of the Queen lacked the usual edge, maybe because she was thinking the same.

"A mother would be a little bit stricter with her love."

"Muh..."

The brusque objection from her secretary rendered the Queen speechless and she puckered her lips.

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At night of the same day.

In the living room of the Inner Palace, the royal couple sat next to each other on the couch after coming out of the bath and was touching glasses.

The four LED floor lamps, positioned in a circle around the two couches with a wooden table in-between, glittery illuminated the red and blue Kiriko glasses from Zenjirou and Aura.

The glasses were filled with an almost transparent alcohol. It was the long-known "distilled liquor", but it was not made by Zenjirou himself this time.

The construction of a distiller was not all that complicated and the craftsmen of the Carpa Kingdom had been able to reproduce it, since they were relative adept at crafting copper ware.

Keeping the appropriate temperature had been a problem, but by trial and error, they apparently found a more or less accurate solution. Of course it was far more inefficient than the distiller from Zenjirou, which had an electronic hotplate that could heat up accurate to a degree, but for now, it was a working alternative.

That very distilled liquor from the distiller that the people of this world had built, was filling the glasses of Aura and Zenjirou right now.

Zenjirou swallowed the experimental alcohol after savouring it slowly and nodded curtly.

"Yep, tastes nice. It's as good as mine. Well, that doesn't mean much coming from me, though. To begin with, I don't know if I should call the taste 'nice', when it tastes just like my amateurish try."

Likewise holding a glass, the Queen gave a smile to the words of her husband.

"Yes, I liked it as well. Good. Looks like we can proceed with a large-scale production."

"Hmm, you sure? If we really want to mass produce it, we would need to make bigger distillers and it's more than likely that unforeseen problems arise with a larger version."

Zenjirou claimed that from a rather negative viewpoint, but Aura kept her smile up.

"We cross that bridge when we get to it. Trail-and-error is an integral part of starting a new business. Besides, I cannot allocate that much personnel to it for now anyway. We will just pay particular attention."

The Carpa Kingdom was still recovering from the previous great war at the present moment. There was a lack of personnel everywhere, so it would be quite difficult to reallocate people for a new business, even for the Monarch.

But the distilled liquor had already been well received, when it was served to the nobles at the night banquet in the Royal Palace. Aura was of the opinion that it was only a matter of time until the initial investment was compensated for, as soon as they had a superstructure for the mass production ready.

"Well, it is no use discussing the distilled liquor any further now. Instead, Zenjirou."

"Mh?"

Zenjirou felt a cold shiver run down his spine, when his wife wiped the smile off her face and looked him straight into his eyes from beside him, and tilted his head puzzled.

"I want to discuss something slightly... no, something rather serious now. Okay?"

"Okay."

He gave his short okay and in order to underline his words, he put the blue Kiriko glass with the distilled liquor back onto the table and stood up from the couch to sit down on the other couch across from the Queen.

"First off, I have to tell you that Puyol Guillén and Lucinda Guzzle, the eldest

daughter of the Guzzle Family, will soon get married.

As such, I would like you to attend their marriage ceremony as my representative. The ceremony will be held in the March of Guzzle."

"Mm, okay."

When the Queen told him that with a stern face, Zenjirou nodded acknowledging with a likewise stern face.

"....Eh? That is all you have to say?"

In light of her exaggerated preamble, Zenjirou had steeled himself for the worse, but he now cocked his head disappointed, since the matter did not sound all that grave to him.

Aura on the other hand heaved a small sigh at the sight of the poor reaction of her husband, and assumed a bitter smiling expression.

"I hate to admit it, but it seems that Fabio was right. Do you see nothing wrong with this?"

"Wrong?"

When Zenjirou still cocked his head perplexed, Aura eased her tension and explained carefully.

"Be it the matter of sending you to Valentia before or the matter of sending you to the March of Guzzle now, I am always deciding on matters without consulting with you in advance. Fabio said I am treating you like a 'convenient pawn'. And to be honest, I cannot deny it."

"Oh, I see."

Seeing his wife look down dejected, Zenjirou clapped his hands together as he finally understood.

He recalled how he had given his wife a small rebuke, when she one-sidedly had decided on his trip to Valentia. But this and that were two different matters.

"Now that you mention it, that really seems to happen a lot lately. But I know that politics sometimes call for a prompt decision, so I'm fine as long as you give

me a convincing explanation afterwards.”

Aura had expected that answer from him. Or to be precise, Secretary Fabio had expected and told her about it at noon.

‘Master Zenjirou is not really offended by your one-sided distribution of work.’

These words of his had been the truth.

Zenjirou was not the least bit offended, even when she claimed to “treat him like a pawn”.

“You never get angry. Are you fine with being ‘treated like a pawn’?”

Aura bluntly asked him that.

Of course the Carpa Kingdom also had some people, who did not protest about being “treated like a pawn”. For example, the knights sworn to Aura actually took pride in being the “pawns of the Queen”.

But if they were to be “treated like a pawn” by their peers, they would surely be up in arms against it, too. The reason Aura could treat them like pawns without a problem was because of the clear hierarchy between the Queen and the Knights.

So it would make sense, when Zenjirou mentally “subordinated” himself to Queen Aura, but when they sat across each other like this, it was obvious at a glance that his attitude was at the same level as hers.

His wife was being honest with him, but her husband from a different world kept his head cocked to the somewhat vague question from her. Still, he answered to the best of his abilities.

“Ehm, I guess everything’s fine for now? But I would like to know now, why I’m being sent to the marriage ceremony, of course, and I’ll certainly get angry, if your explanation doesn’t sit well with me.”

In his mind, he was not really seeing Aura treating him like a “pawn”. On the contrary, he often cursed his own inability to help his wife, who was having a hard time with her duties.

“Hmm...”

Still not convinced by the answer of her husband, Aura breathed an anxious sound.

“Besides, you’re the Ruler here and I’m just your husband, so I think it’s only natural that you decide some things for me?”

Zenjirou simply considered it “situation-dependent” to “obey the orders from a peer”.

In middle and high school, he had obeyed a junior in regards to his position during the matches of the soccer club, and as a working adult, he had witnessed a couple of meetings, where the project members obeyed the instructions of their even-aged project leader. Needless to say, the situation could go into reverse on the next project, when someone else became the project leader.

Zenjirou only knew the Japanese way of thinking and amidst that, the moral concept that everyone was equal was not contradictory to the fact that there needed to be two kind of people, namely one giving orders and one following orders, in order to effectively and smoothly run an organisation.

Aura on the other hand was raised in a world with the moral concept that the hierarchy also constituted the line of command par for par, except for a few exceptions, so she might have trouble understanding it.

“...I see. Well, as long as you are fine with it. But we have already diverged from initially promised outlook quite a bit by now. Thus, I deemed it necessary to have a proper talk with you.”

“The initially promised outlook?”

“Yes. When I summoned you, I told you that I would ask you for nothing but your cooperation in making a child, right?”

“Oh, that.”

Zenjirou clasped his hand understanding in response to the reply from Aura.

“Well, you don’t have to worry about that. I never expected you to keep that promise anyway.”

“Huh!?”

For the first time since they had met, the Queen looked hurt from the bottom

of her heart, so her husband quickly corrected himself.

"Ah, no! That's... that's not what I meant, Aura! It's not like I don't trust you. I just wanted to say that the conditions were too good to be true and I never expected to be a full-time sponger, because the Prince Consort is still royalty after all. Nothing more than that!"

As the fruit of his earnest explanation, Aura's expression took a change for the better.

Seeing that, Zenjirou heaved a sigh of relief while he continued.

"So I might be late in saying this, but I completely agree with your idea to discuss everything in honesty. We should forget all about 'what is currently right' and about being 'considerate' or 'reserved'. Let's just lay bare our genuine wishes."

"Yes, I guess we have to start from there."

With her intent finally coming across, the Queen leaned forward while remaining seated on the couch, in response to the answer from Zenjirou.

"Then let me hear your wish first of all. What do you want to do, Zenjirou? How do you want to live your life from now on?"

The serious question from his wife prompted a slightly overwhelmed Zenjirou to clear his throat affected once before he slowly framed an answer.

"Hmm, okay. Then I'll just list my wishes as I think of them. It might sound a bit inconsistent, though.

Here I go: I want more time with you. I want to live together with Zenkichi. I want all three of us to sleep together in the same bed. But sometimes it would be good, when it's just us two in the bed. We wouldn't be sleeping then, though.

On the other hand, I don't want any woman beside you. The Inner Palace is my home, my family, so I don't want anyone from outside the family in it.

What else... Oh right, I'm starting to miss the food from Japan. And I want to do something about the shampoo that's almost used up.

I'm curious about how the soccer team I supported is doing. I want to play

some soccer, even if it's just on a sandlot. I want to listen to the new songs from my favourite band. I want to access the internet on my computer.

And I'm bored to death in the afternoon, so I want to do something productive. Making the distilled liquor was fun, for instance.

But I don't want to shoulder any heavy responsibilities like foreign policies. And I absolutely hate to attend parties, where countless nobles try to push concubines onto me at all times."

As expected, even Zenjirou had some pent-up frustrations. In the beginning, he had made some petty demands, but over time, his wishes started to get more and more selfish, finally escalating into voicing his grievance.

Hearing that gush of words, Aura kept a composed expression on the surface, but heaved a sigh of relief at heart.

(I was right to bring up the subject. It seems he really has bottled up quite the frustration without knowing it.)

Zenjirou was an understanding man with a high tolerance limit. Even if there was something he would like to do, he would soft-pedal, when there was a legit reason not to do it. And he would do something against his will, when the situation called for it.

Because of his nature, Zenjirou himself tended to misunderstand it, but he in fact piled up the dissatisfaction about not doing what he wanted to do, and the frustration about being made to do something against his will.

His mind comprehended the fact that he could not avoid doing it, but his heart had trouble keeping up with that reasoning. Without even realizing it themselves, people would thus store a pool of negative emotions and become more irritated towards trivial things, answering with sarcasm.

Fortunately enough, Zenjirou was relatively broad-minded, so these symptoms had not surfaced yet, but listening to him made it clear how much frustration he had built up.

"Well, I know I'm just being selfish here, but that's it."

Zenjirou went red in the face, as he became embarrassed about having

thrown a demanding tantrum like a child, but he also looked somewhat relieved.

Her husband had uttered his desires outright for the first time. Of course Aura held an opinion about it.

But for now, she showed no reaction in particular to his words and voiced her own wishes like they had agreed on in advance.

"My wishes can be arranged in two categories: What I wish for as your wife and what I wish for as the Queen of this Kingdom.

The first category is unproblematic. As a woman, I want to monopolize you as well. Likewise, I want us to spend more time with Carlos. In that point, our wishes coincide.

So I want you to understand that the wishes I am going to tell you now are only from my standpoint as the Queen."

"Mm, okay."

Listening to his wife, Zenjirou understood in his mind that he should take it serious now, but he just could not help but smile.

He could put himself in Aura's shoes for a bit now, since she always tried to make him say embarrassing stuff like "I love you". Even if you could be sure of the feelings of your partner, it was still something special, when it was put it into words like this. His whole body was stricken by a pleasantly prickling bashfulness.

The Queen softened her gaze for a second, when she saw him raising the corners of his mouth, but immediately put on a serious expression again and continued.

"As the Queen, the first thing I want you do is take a concubine.

It is becoming more and more difficult to shut up the nobles of our country. And when you take one, the Twin Kingdom will not ignore it, because of the secret agreement we have. So I want you to take another concubine from their side as well.

The power balance on the continent will shift, when we manage to make

magical tools with the glass pearls in the future. And for that, I would like to establish a new court noble family without its own territory that inherits the 'Bestowal Magic' in our Kingdom.

In accordance, I would like to advance the glass production thoroughly and I need your help in that. I will gladly take any ideas that increase the fortune of the Royal Family like the waterwheel improvements or the distilled liquor, too.

Needless to say, I want you to continue your work as my representative, because we two are the only grown-up royalties in our country.

A lot of negotiations call for royalty to be present and it will ease the burden on me, when you attend any proforma events in my stead."

"Oh god..."

Zenjirou obviously made a face at the blunt demands from Queen Aura and croaked out a genuinely repulsed voice.

It was as expected, but the wishes from Zenjirou and the wishes from Queen Aura beautifully contradicted each other. They only barely agreed on the manufacture stuff like glass or liquor, but everything else was something Queen Aura wanted him to do as much as Zenjirou wanted to avoid it.

Aura kept her mask as the Queen and continued.

"But the thing I am most afraid of is that we seriously will grow apart. So you have nothing to worry about, nor do you need to be reserved. I will generally prioritize your feelings over the wishes I just mentioned.

Nevertheless, tell me all of your dissatisfaction only in the 'Inner Palace'. I want you to refrain from criticizing me in the Royal Palace. It would be the most fatal wound for me."

Zenjirou could not conceal his surprise towards the words from the Queen.

"I would never criticize you. Wait, is this country really that male-dominated?"

The Queen shook her head with a stern face in response to his question.

"No, it was not really a problem at first. No matter how patriarchal our culture may be, the Crown has enough power to overturn it.

Besides, I have quite the strong powerbase, if I may say so myself, because I led the country to victory in the previous war, where everything was in chaos from having lost four rulers, my uncle, my father, my little and older brothers, in succession.

Just like I had originally foreseen, it was no real problem while you just stayed in the Inner Palace and only helped with making a child.

However, that no longer applies to you. For better or worse, you are intelligent enough to handle foreign negotiations and have an extremely understanding personality. Everyone knows that now."

"Oops. Did I get ahead of myself?"

Zenjirou screwed up his face all too late, but Aura shook her head.

"No, you have done well. It is entirely my fault. In the beginning, I had only wanted you to attend the bare minimum of events or parties, but you proved to be more 'useful' than I had expected, so I ended up relying on you more and more without realizing it."

The reason for that must have been her pregnancy.

Before it, Zenjirou certainly only had the bare minimum of duties to fulfil. But when Aura got pregnant and felt worse than expected, she could no longer undertake her duties as the Queen like before.

The only one with enough status to act as her representative was Zenjirou and he was competent enough to accomplish the duties as her representative appropriately. In a way, it was an unfortunate combination.

Even while Aura was still recovering from having given birth, Zenjirou continued to support his wife as her representative. Queen Aura ended up getting used to it and without knowing it, she took it for granted that her husband would work as her representative, even after she had fully recovered.

The decisive blow had been the earlier ruckus with the Pack Dragons attacking Valentia.

Strictly speaking, it had been Xavier Guzzle, Raffaelo Márguez and Skathi aka. Victoria Kronkvist, the female warrior from the Uppsala Kingdom, who achieved

the subjugation, but on the paper, Zenjirou had been in charge of the final battle with the Pack Dragons.

In other words, he proved that he was more than capable to hold his own in the court and showed everyone that he was ready to stand on the battlefield himself, when it called for it.

It would be no exaggeration to say that Zenjirou already had enough influence to start up his own faction in the Royal Palace, if he felt like it.

Hearing that explanation from his wife, Zenjirou was a bit troubled over the unnecessarily high evaluation he got, but he understood the situation he was in and nodded with a serious expression.

“Okay. I was already mindful about it before, but from now on, I’ll be even more careful about my actions outside the Inner Palace. These kind of malicious rumours usually spread without consideration for the concerned party after all.”

“Yes, please do.”

Aura was about to heave a sigh of relief in response to the usual understanding reply of her husband, when she suddenly realized something.

(Not good. I was supposed to listen to his wishes today, but at some point, I started to push my conveniences onto him again. If I am not careful, the bad habit to rely on the patience of my husband gets out again.)

The Queen strongly reprimanded herself, pulled herself together and faced her husband anew.

“Well, I can only ask for your understanding in that matter, but for everything else, I intend to grant as many of your wishes as possible.

We both do have an interest in producing things such as the distilled liquor, so please focus on that.”

“Yeah, I want to complete a magnet first of all. Once the goats arrive here, I want to make cheese and butter, but I heard the Uppsala Kingdom has these, too, so instead of trying on my own, it might be faster to ask Princess Freya for help.”

"Oh, right. I have not told you about it yet. Princess Freya and her group have already left Valentia. That goes for your goats as well, of course. They should arrive in the Capital in a few days."

"Oh, I can't wait."

Zenjirou revealed a grin in light of her notice. With dairy goods like cheese, butter or cream, he would be able to try out all the confectionary that had been impossible to reproduce so far. Having more semiluxury food you meant having a richer life.

The mood started to relax from the merry topic, but Aura addressed another complicated matter.

"Let us move on. You are reluctant to get involved with foreign affairs and higher society. If possible, you would like to abstain from doing it. Correct?"

"To be honest, yes. But I know it's part of my job as royalty, so I'll do it with gritted teeth, even if I don't like it."

Leaning back into the couch, Zenjirou glared at the ceiling and was immersed in his thoughts for a bit before he answered like that.

It was his job or his obligation as royalty, to be precise.

"In other words, you would prefer it, when you do not have to do the things that can be avoided?"

When the Queen asked him that, Zenjirou brooded over it, then shook his head.

"...Not quite. It's a bit complicated. I can't seem to settle down, when I do nothing, although I know there's work to do."

Of course it would be great, if there's no work to begin with, but when there's work to do, I don't really want to run away from it."

"Mh? Could you elaborate a bit more? It is a bit hard to understand."

The Queen cocked her head puzzled, whereupon Zenjirou pondered for a moment and then explained it while cocking his head thoughtfully as well.

"Ehm, how shall I put it? The work in foreign affairs or higher society certainly

is a pain. But it's even more painful for me to turn a blind eye on my obligations as royalty."

Put another way: It was the same difference as between "playing truant" and "having a day off school" for a student.

Going to school every day was real a bother, so you were extremely grateful, when the school closed for a day. But the illegal act of "playing truant" left you with a guilty conscience. Instead of going through that, it was so much easier just to attend school every day, even if it was a bother.

A reasonable amount of diligence, a reasonable amount of seriousness and a reasonable amount of reluctance. That kind of mentality was not all that rare for a Modern Japanese.

His careful, but clumsy explanation let Aura still more or less understand what he wanted to say, since she was quick in the uptake.

"I see. You mean that you would feel guilty about abandoning your obligations, even if you hate them. And that it would be a lesser burden on your mind, when you reluctantly do your work, instead of experiencing that guilty conscience."

"Yeah, pretty much. Ah, but my patience has its limits, too, of course! It's still quite alright for now, but my workload keeps growing lately, right? If it goes on like that, I'll be at the end of my patience soon enough."

"Hmm, you are right. Forgive me. I will be more careful from now on."

The Queen apologized in a laudable manner to her husband, who preached caution.

"Yeah, please. Ah, but you don't have to worry about emergencies like the wedding now or the trip to Valentia before that."

"I see."

Aura summarized the conclusion they had reached just now inside her head.

(In short, I can allocate work for him like before, if it is an emergency, but I better reduce his general workload for foreign affairs or higher society as much as possible.)

Foreign affairs could involve people like Prince Francesco and Princess Bona or the soon arriving Princess Freya, whom Zenjirou had to entertain at all costs, but everyone else like foreign diplomats or national nobles did not necessarily require the hospitality from royalty. It just meant that things would proceed more smoothly, when royalty was present.

"Okay, I shall limit your work for foreign affairs and higher society to an acceptable level from now on."

It was kind of unfortunate that she could only make minimum use of her pawn known as the Prince Consort now, but the Queen concluded that it was her turn to give ground here.

"You also mentioned all kind of things you wanted. Since I did not really understand it, I take it that these are things from your world. Would it be possible to get your hands on these on this world? Ah, you do not have to worry about money or such. Just tell me if it is possible or not."

When Aura told him that money and effort were not an issue, Zenjirou cast his gaze to the ceiling and mused.

"Hmm... It's definitely impossible to watch a match of the junior league here. Soccer by itself is technically possible here. You just need to gather some people and teach them the rules, but I would rather not do that, since it only complicates my connections further."

Listening to any new songs is impossible, too. Or at least I can't think of how it would be possible.

But the food from Japan will be possible once I get the goats. Well, it'll mainly be confectionary, though.

As for the shampoo, I already started to work on a replacement. I was ready to make the bath supplies here from the very beginning, so I put some instructions on my computer.

For stuff like soap shampoo or hair rinse from mixing kelp ash with citrus juice."

"Indeed. The soap shampoo does concern me as well. It should be no problem to acquire the ingredients for it at least."

The Queen let on about her standpoint as his wife for a bit, when Zenjirou answered like that, and nodded in agreement.

She was using the same soap shampoo as him. After all, they were usually sleeping in the same bed. There would be no point if only Zenjirou cleaned himself up, but Aura refrained from doing so.

Considering that, she was already quite accommodating to her husband.

The Carpa Kingdom had a climate of high temperatures and high humidity, so the custom of taking baths was relatively widespread, but not even royalty or nobility took one every day. Moreover, it was common practice to apply a lot of perfumed oil to erase the smell on the body or hair, but Zenjirou hated the scent and sensation of the perfumed oil to no end, so Aura refrained from using it inside the Inner Palace out of consideration for him.

Needless to say, it was sort of common sense for aristocracy in the Carpa Kingdom that the perfumed oil was indispensable, when she pursued her duties as the Queen of the Carpa Kingdom in the Royal Palace.

Thus Aura was thoroughly washing off the perfumed oil she had applied to her hair and skin in the Royal Palace every day in the Inner Palace, sometimes repeating that pattern numerous times a day.

She changed herself to suit the preferences of her husband. That was a praiseworthy approach, but in a way, she was no exception to the model of femininity in the male-dominated Carpa Kingdom.

Whether he knew about the devotion of his wife or not, Zenjirou nodded with a smile.

“Good, please do that. To be honest, I’m rather obstinate, when it comes to hygiene. Well, I can bear with it, when I only sweat a bit like right now, but I just have to take a bath, when it’s so humid during the Rainy Season or I sweat all over during the Hottest Season.”

He said that was a slightly troubled expression, since he realized that he was being selfish.

“Hmm, I can understand the Rainy Season, but I fail to comprehend how you can take a hot bath instead of a cold one during the oppressive heat of the

Hottest Season. Still, if it is that important to you, I will comply with you."

The Queen was the most important figure in the Kingdom, but she was adjusting her lifestyle to his.

Speaking of, it was also selfish of Zenjirou how he usually did not allow any waiting maids into the living room. Aura was born and raised as royalty, so she should take it for granted that she was surrounded by waiting maids all the time.

Despite that, Aura adopted herself to Zenjirou's common sense and kept the waiting maids out of their private space as much as possible. That meant that she had to fetch anything in the room by herself and change simple sets of clothing by herself. There was no way that it left her unaffected.

"Thanks, Aura."

Zenjirou gave thanks to her from the bottom of his heart, when the devoted love of his wife was brought to his mind once again.

Because she had taken him, a man with moral values different from her world, as her Prince Consort, Aura had to muster up a tolerance she would originally never need.

(I need to remember that at all times. Otherwise, I might get the illusion that I'm the only one that has to soft-pedal. And that would be arrogant.)

Zenjirou told himself that once more.

"You are welcome. It was not worth mentioning, though. So, anything else?"

Zenjirou cracked a wry smile, when his wife brushed it off manly, and continued.

"The internet, I guess. You told me it's impossible before, but I think it would be feasible with some specialized magical tools to connect to the internet in this world.

The 'Summoning Magic' is dependant on the star constellation. So if we bring a small space in line with the correct constellation through 'Time Reversal' or 'Time Acceleration', it would make that space eligible for the 'Summoning Magic', wouldn't it?

When we use the ‘Summoning Magic’ then, I say it’s possible to link our worlds for a bit.”

His aim was to create an environment, where his computer could access the internet, by linking it to a space with a nearby WiFi hotspot.

To achieve that, Aura did not need to make a human-sized connection between the worlds like she did, when she summoned Zenjirou here. Simply put, it sufficed to have a hole with the size of an eye of a needle, as long as the wireless signal could get through.

But Aura shook her head regretful after hearing the detailed plan from her husband.

“No, like I told you before, that is impossible.

First of all, ‘Time Reversal’ can only be cast onto a specific object, not some kind of space. Even if you wanted to cast it on an area, you would need to adjust the incantation first. And when you do that, the required amount of magical power will change as well. You would basically create a completely new kind of spell.”

“A new spell? Can you actually do that, Aura?”

Aura answered with a laugh to the surprised Zenjirou.

“Of course. I may not be as good as the seasoned court mages, but I can improve already existing spells. The bloodline magic is a secret skill, so royalty has no choice but to fiddle with it themselves.”

If anything, Aura specialized in politics and warfare. She was not really passionate about advancing magic. But as royalty, she knew about her obligation to pass the bloodline magic onto the next generation, so she had acquired the essential knowledge and skills for it.

In fact, Aura had modified the ‘Summoning Magic’ that she had used to bring Zenjirou into this world.

The original “Summoning Magic” was restrictive, since it could only summon someone you clearly envisioned in your mind. With the condition “a man with a disposition for Space-Time Magic living in a different world”, she had modified it

in such a way that she could bring an unknown person into this world.

Having said this, the previous King Carlos II, well-known for his magic research, had devised the majority of that modification and Aura had only given it the final touch.

She then threw more cold water on Zenjirou's hopes.

"Besides, the 'Summoning Magic' itself is a problem. All it can do is instantly summon a person or object from a different world. But you want to link both worlds for the longer term, correct? That would require a completely different magic."

Maybe something like a 'World Link' spell? But even if you take an already existing spell, it would already take more or less a year to adjust. And I honestly have no idea how long it would take to create a new spell from scratch."

"Grml..."

When the problematic points were practically slapped into his face, Zenjirou screwed up his face and fell silent.

He still knew relatively little about magic, but even so, he could somehow tell that it was extremely difficult to devise a new spell such as "World Link" while adjusting the "Time Reversal" magic at the same time.

In the worst-case scenario, it might turn out to be quicker, when he studied magic with all his might and devised the magic himself instead of Aura, since she was always busy with something, whereas he had relative much free time on his hands.

Although he understood all that, Zenjirou still could not let go of the idea and questioned his wife further.

"Okay, I understand that it's impossible in practice for now. But in theory? Let's say we can adjust 'Time Reversal' to be cast on an area and create a new 'World Link' magic. Would it be possible to do it then?"

Is it even realistic to adjust 'Time Reversal' and create a 'World Link' magic?"

The question from her husband prompted the Queen to cross her arms under

her breasts and ponder for a moment before she replied.

"Hmm, I am not that knowledgeable about magic to call myself an expert, so I cannot say for sure, but it should technically be possible. Both magic are a kind of Space-Time magic after all."

But to be honest, I am not sure whether that alone will suffice to achieve what you want to do.

Shifting an area into the past with an adjusted 'Time Reversal' and continuously connecting our worlds with 'World Link' would require an enormous amount of non-stop magical power. It will be impossible to maintain, unless you draw the magical power from 'Future Compensation'."

This implied that they needed a double deployment of "Future Compensation". If the worst came to the worst, they would have to pay with several month worth of magical power from Aura for a couple of minutes to access the internet.

"Uwah, it takes that much? Ah, but you can store your magical power from time to time in the magical tool Prince Francesco is going to make, right? If we use that..."

Her husband beamed with joy as though he had found a solution, but the Queen shook her head inexpressively.

"No, I cannot permit that. I already decided how to use that tool. You told me that the things you brought with you have a lifespan, right? I will use the stored magical power to cast 'Time Reversal' on them from time to time."

The things she spoke of mainly referred to his electrical appliances.

The LED floor lamps, the refrigerator, the air conditioner, the television, the computer, etcetera. All of them had a guaranteed lifespan of five to ten years from the manufacturer. Even the domestic hydropower generator, which was the foundation for everything else, only had a lifespan of fifteen to twenty years. Moreover, they were not in Japan here. This world had higher temperatures than Japan, so it would not be strange, if the electrical appliances were to break before the guarantee of the manufacture expired.

"Oh, right. That definitely has more priority than accessing the internet.

Nothing beats having a long-living refrigerator or aircon after all.”

Zenjirou clapped his hands convinced. Originally, he had brought along the home devices as some kind of “support wheels” until he got used to his new life in the Carpa Kingdom, but why pass on the opportunity, when a cheat-like magic like “Time Reversal” could prolong their lifespan.

Especially the aforementioned refrigerator and air-conditioner were a real treasure on the overwhelmingly hot South Continent.

Fascinated by their appeal, the Queen started to agree with her husband for a moment, but then shook her head as if to shake off the temptation.

“Yes, you are right... No, wait. I want to preserve them, too, if possible, but I primarily want to use it on something else, namely that so-called computer of yours. It got the highest priority.”

In light of her unexpected answer, Zenjirou cocked his head baffled.

“My computer? You can’t use it, can you? So why?”

Needless to say, the operating system and programs on his computer were mainly in Japanese. It was completely useless to Aura, since she did not know Japanese or English.

But she replied with a confident look.

“Because I want you to keep using it for the ‘tax check-up’. The yearly tax report is heavily influenced by it.”

So far, Zenjirou had input the written tax reports given to Aura by the feudal lords every year into the calculation software on his computer and double-checked them.

On the basis of that calculation, Aura reprimanded the feudal lords about their taxes, squeezing profit from it for the treasury.

It was an advantage beyond description that Zenjirou, someone she had absolute faith in, was doing the whole final tax check by himself. Thanks to him, the news that you could not dodge the taxes on paper from the Royal Family, spread like wildfire.

Of course forging the tax documents was not the only way to dodge the taxes.

There were plenty of other methods such as changing the size of the delivery carriages carrying the goods, specifying the population or farmland in the domain lesser than it actually was or obtaining tax exemptions due to made-up catastrophes.

Accordingly, the calculation software only covered a small portion of the tax evasion as a whole, but the fact that the forgery of the documents was seen through, put a lot of pressure on the feudal lords.

Although Zenjirou was convinced by her explanation, he put forth his next doubt.

"Hmm, I understand the value of the computer now, but is it wise to entrust a government system to a machine only I can use? Or do you plan to learn how to use it?"

The Queen shook her head with an earnest expression in response to his question.

"Well, I would like to, if I had the time, but I will leave it to our daughter."

That reply came out of the blue.

"Daughter'? Huh? What do you mean?"

Needless to say, the only child they had right now was Prince Carlos Zenkichi and like his title implied, he was a boy.

Aura then explained it carefully to the puzzled Zenjirou.

"You see, I have been thinking about it for some time now. We have a monopoly on this method thanks to that computer tool of yours and it would be a shame to discontinue it after our generation."

In other words, we just have to pass it onto the next generation. A child between you and me will be able to use 'Space-Time Magic' more likely than not. And if it is a girl, she can stay in the Inner Palace until she is grown-up. It should not be all that difficult to teach her how to use it, when you have all the time in the world.

Of course we will teach her 'Space-Time Magic' as well. Once she can use 'Future Compensation' and 'Time Reversal' and only uses it on your 'heritage', it

will be possible to keep the system running for a long time.”

“Y-Yeah, I see now...”

Zenjirou reacted with a frown to the words of his wife.

She wanted to raise her future daughter into a maintenance worker and user of all the electrical appliances. Her idea was certainly promising, if you only took the profit for the Royal Family as a whole in consideration.

But Zenjirou was raised in a normal Japanese household, so to be honest, he was fiercely against deciding the role of his own daughter in life before her birth without consent and treating her almost like some “repair tool for the electrical appliances”.

The same could technically be said about the First Prince Carlos Zenkichi, since it was set in stone the moment he was born that he would be the next King, so Zenjirou might just have to accept it as the fate of Royalty.

“In the future, I would like to establish a matrilineal branch family, whose matriarchs will undertake the same responsibility generation after generation.

There is always the risk that the branch family may be taking over, when you give them special privileges, so we would have to be careful about it, but in my opinion, it is not such a bad idea, if we can work together as a unified ‘Royal Family’. What do you think?”

The Queen had guessed from his expression that he was not really fond of her idea, so she gave a more elaborated explanation in order to convince him.

“Hmm, yeah...”

For a moment, Zenjirou was going to say that he left the decision up to Aura like always, but then he remembered that they wanted to have an open conversation without reservation today.

He put both feet on the ground and leaned a bit forward on the couch for some reason before he nervously spoke his mind.

“Ehm, I wonder if our daughter can become happy, when we enforce only one way of living on her the moment she’s born?”

As the Ruler of a major power, Aura could not really relate to his honest

opinion.

"Mh? The fact that she will be born as royalty means that her way of living is already decided. Whether she will be happy or not depends on the love we give her as her family, the ease and comfort from the wet nurse and her own effort most of all. Am I wrong?"

In this world it was only natural to be born into a certain class and take over the business of the family as a rule. According to its moral concept it was by no means an unfortunate thing to have your "way of living decided upon birth".

If anything, the younger siblings even envied that secure future, because they were in a position, where they could not follow in the steps of their parents.

Zenjirou understood that in his head, but his heart could not quite keep up with it after all.

Based on the premise that your future was already outlined for you, you pursued your own happiness as appropriate in this world, whereas in Modern Japan you principally had the all the freedom to choose your job. These two set of values had very few in common.

At a loss what to do with his sympathetic reasoning and unsympathetic emotions, Zenjirou scratched his head irritated on a rare occasion.

"Ah, yeah, you're right. Well, you are, but... I think it's scary to have everything decided already upon birth. You can't rule out the possibility, either, that she can't keep up with the lesson for the calculation software, not to mention the other devices."

In Modern Japan, almost anyone could master the calculation software with enough time.

But the circumstances were entirely different here in the Carpa Kingdom. Since their daughter would be born as royalty of the Carpa Kingdom, she would learn the language of the western part of the South Continent as her mother tongue. Learning the writing of that language took priority as well, of course.

It should be extremely difficult for such a person to master the calculation software, since it displayed literally everything, even the help screen, only in Japanese or English. Moreover, Zenjirou was by no means an "expert" in

regards to the computer or the calculation software, so he did not really qualify as a teacher.

Even so, he might be able to teach her the essential operations, but just like he had mentioned just now, its success was not absolutely certain.

"Hmm, maybe I should write a manual about the stuff for posterity?"

"Yes, that sounds good. Knowledge tends to distort every time you pass it on only by word of mouth. It would be extremely helpful, when you leave behind a written manual."

It would take a bit of effort to put his knowledge into a book, but it was actually not all that difficult to accomplish. After all, this world had the automatic translator known as "Soul of Words".

All they had to do was having Zenjirou dictate it to Aura while she wrote it down in the language of the western part of the South Continent. It was not an easy job as a whole, but it would not be such a huge burden, when they did it bit by bit every evening.

"Yeah, it doesn't hurt to have a manual either way. By the way."

"Yes?"

Her husband suddenly looked around restlessly and wore a hinted smile, whereupon the Queen cocked her head a bit wondering.

"Well, we keep talking this and that about our 'daughter', but we still don't have one, right?"

The conversation resolved around the premise that they would get a daughter in the future. Did that meant that the ban on the recently neglected "act to make children" was lifted? Seeing as her husband was brimming over with that desire, the Queen gave him the answer he was waiting for with a grin.

"Oh, that. Yes, you guessed right.

Carlos is growing up well and you have taken quite some work off my shoulders as my representative. My condition is fine as well, so I think the time has come to make a second child."

"...Oho."

Zenjirou answered with a low voice while his pupils dilated and the corners of his mouth twitched upwards past comparison.

“You look lecherous.”

His expression displayed his lust so straightforward that even the steadfast Aura reflexively felt like backing off while she gave him a wry smile.

“...Ohoho.”

Moreover, Zenjirou raised both his hands to his head and erratically moved his ten fingers in a gripping manner.

“You are acting lecherous as well.”

Aura quickly embraced herself in an attempt to hide her cleavage with her arms, since she sensed danger. But no amount of arms could ever hope to conceal her voluptuous body in the thin nightgown she was wearing.

If anything, she actually emphasised her cleavage by hugging herself, giving rise to a sensational sight.

“Hah, Hah, Hah...”

Still looking lecherous and moving his hands lecherously, Zenjirou raised from the couch in a stooping position and approached her slowly.

“Wait, what are you going to do with these hands?”

Practically gluing herself to the back of the couch, Aura took her distance from him.

“Hoh, Hoh, Hoh...”

Zenjirou put his right foot on the wooden table between the two couches without hesitation and slowly drew closer to his wife in a straight line.

“Hey, calm down. Your lust has gotten the better of you.”

“You told me to be open about ‘my desires without holding back’ today.”

“I did not mean it like that! I wanted you to speak your mind and said nothing about taking action on the spot!”

Seeing as she did not move from the couch despite her protest, Aura must

have been willing, too. Besides, they were as different as a little kitten and a tiger in regards to physical strength. If Aura seriously wanted to resist, Zenjirou would have no chance against her.

After he slowly climbed over the table, Zenjirou leaned over the couch his wife was sitting on.

“Uhihihi...”

“Wait. Let us go to the bedroom at least.”

“Too far.”

“It is not! It is right over there!”

“Right now, it’s an insurmountable distance for me.”

It was pretty rare for Zenjirou to oppose Aura that much. He had probably “hungered” for this situation that bad.

It was useless. There was no way to stop him.

“Jeez...”

Realizing that, the Queen showed a faint wry smile and spread her arms resigned, accepting her husband, who was crowding her from above.

“Gehehe...!”

“Oh please, at least speak normal.”

Nevertheless, she did not miss out on giving her husband a light smack on the back part of his head while he buried his face into her breasts.

Chapter 02: Victory Celebration in the Capital

The residents of the Capital perceived a sudden event in the Capital such as a victory celebration as bothersome on the one hand, but it was the perfect opportunity for some fun on the other hand.

After all, how could it not be a bother, when the always heavily trafficked main street was going to be blocked for a whole day.

But at the same time, it was pretty much a festival, so amusement was guaranteed. The smart merchants opened up stalls near the blocked main street and anyone with a house facing the main street rented the roof or second floor to some spectators for some extra income.

Sure, it would be a problem, if it lasted for numerous days, but once in a while, it was a welcome change.

For that reason, Princess Freya and her vassals were received very warm-hearted, when they arrived from the Seaport of Valentia, making a triumphal entry.

Various dragon-drawn carriages and fully armed soldiers paraded over the main street of the Capital.

The vanguard consisted of a dragon-drawn cart that carried the skull of the Huge Pack Dragon. Because it had been a couple of days since its defeat, the decaying skin and flesh had been scrapped off, so it was just the bare bone now, but even then, the huge skull was still quite impressive by itself.

“Wow! So huge!! The head alone is as tall as myself!”

“That blonde female warrior on top of it was the one to finish it off.”

“She’s quite tall herself. To be honest, I wouldn’t want to stand next to her.”

“But she’s pretty. A fine woman.”

As expected, the eyes of the gathered spectators were all focussed on the

skull of the Huge Pack Dragon and the blonde female warrior Victoria Kronqvist alias Skathi, who stood atop of it.

It was extremely rare on the South Continent that a woman enlisted as a warrior. Even more so, when she was capable of leading an own unit and defeating the Huge Pack Dragon. That alone made her already an object of attention.

On top of that, Skathi was an eye-catching beauty.

With an height of over one-hundred and eighty centimetre, she was extraordinarily tall for a woman and her body was trained to such an extent that you could tell on a glance, but despite that, her breasts and bottom kept a feminine curve. And although the look in her eyes was a bit too piercing, she still qualified as a “beauty”.

It goes without saying that a beautiful female warrior from a different country caused a sensation with her military achievement.

Her master, Princess Freya, had also told her beforehand that her military achievement was contributing quite a bit to the negotiations, so Skathi was proudly throwing out her chest and swung around her beloved short spear with the Sea Elephant Tusk in response to the spectators on the street.

Behind her followed the soldiers of the Uppsala Kingdom, who were an object of attention as well.

“I’ve got to say, the guys from the North Continent sure are tall. All of them are at least a head taller than me.”

“You can say that again! Is the North Continent the land of giants, or what?”

Their hair was blonde or light brown and their blue, green or gray eyes had vivid colours as well. Their keen faces were coupled with projected cheeks and a beard from the chin up. And above all, even the smallest of them was at least one-hundred and eighty centimetre tall, whereas the bigger ones had a muscular physique that easily measured over one-hundred and ninety centimetre.

These foreign giants were parading in unfamiliar leather or chain armours while wearing swords and short spears. That sight automatically made you back

off one step, even if you knew that they posed no danger.

A few young men amongst the spectators touched their own arms or chests, comparing themselves to the army of giants passing by in front of them.

The pompously decorated carriage, driving shielded in the middle of these soldiers, drew relatively few attention.

Although the carriage was quite big, splendid and drawn by four Raptorial Dragons, it was not really an unusual sight for the residents of the Capital as compared to the skull of the Huge Pack Dragon or the giant soldiers of the North Continent.

Of course it would be a different matter, if Princess Freya were to put her beautiful silver hair and ice-blue eyes on display, but for reasons of safety, the enclosed carriage had very small windows.

Princess Freya did sit by the window and waved her hands with a smile to the citizens on the streets, but only a few people noticed her.

If anything, she used the window to intently observe the Capital of a different country for the first time.

(It looks a lot more prosperous than I thought. The main street is cobbled with a wheel path for vehicles. The houses are mainly built with wood, but in an elaborated manner and usually two-storied along the main street. Some even have a third story.

The people look healthy as well and I cannot see any starved out people, nor any homeless children. Considering that the great war ended only a few years ago, I would say it is safe to assume that this is indeed a flourishing major power.)

Princess Freya acknowledged once again that a trade agreement with this country would bring a lot of profit for her mother country.

“If possible, I would like to request that His Majesty Zenjirou continues to act as my contact person...”

She suddenly breathed what she was thinking at heart, but the waiting maid assigned to her by the Carpa Kingdom, sat at a distance, so she did not hear it.

The exchange between Zenjirou and Princess Freya had only lasted for a few days, but in these few days, she had more or less caught on to the personality from the man called Zenjirou.

For royalty, he was pure-minded and sincere to the point that she had never seen someone like him before. Despite his standing as the Prince Consort, he did not seem to have much authority or decision-making power, but Princess Freya preferred to negotiate with a sincere and non-fraudulent person, even if he had less authority.

Otherwise put: Princess Freya viewed Zenjirou as a “negotiation partner that was easy to deal with”.

(His Majesty Zenjirou is the Prince Consort and one of the two royalty in this kingdom right now. That leaves only one other royalty to deal with: Her Majesty Aura. If half of what I have heard is true, she will be a formidable opponent, though.)

The silver-haired princess continued to wave her snow-white hand with a smile while she thought about these things at heart.

*

Around the time, when the delegation from the Uppsala Kingdom centred around Princess Freya made their victory parade through the main street of the Capital, Raffaelo Márquez had already returned to the Capital ahead of them and was now meeting with his father, Count Manuel Márquez, in the residence of their family in the Capital in a long time.

“It has been a while, Raffaelo. I hope you have been well. You did well in fulfilling the difficult assignment this time.”

“Not at all, Sir. It was not all that difficult, actually. I am glad that you assigned me a worthwhile job that was specially tailored for me.”

The conversation sounded a bit stiff for one between a father and his son, but amongst grown-up nobles, the relationship between Count Márquez and his son was actually quite good.

The father acknowledged his son as a competent successor and the son respected his father as a level-headed predecessor. Although they did have

some differences in opinion, their relationship was enviable, when measured against the majority of other nobility.

The never-ending cheers of the citizens could be heard through the opened windows and Count Márquez let his gaze wander in its direction.

“Sounds like Princess Freya and her group made it to the Capital just fine. They must be rather popular to cause such a ruckus.”

“The soldiers of the North Continent do attract a lot of attention. And the skull of the Huge Pack Dragon and Miss Victoria at the front are quite the spectacle. The rumours of the Pack Dragon Subjugation have even reached the Capital after all.”

Raffaelo had accompanied Princess Freya and her group part of the way from Valentia to the Capital and he replied like that with a smile.

“That is kind of rich, coming from you.”

Count Márquez made a wry smile, because he no doubts that his own son, sitting across from him, had spread these rumours.

The Capital spoke about the previous Pack Dragon Subjugation in such a way that Zenjirou had been the nominal leader on the battlefield while Xavier Guzzle had led the main force and Victoria Kronqvist had defeated the Huge Pack Dragon by herself.

This was no different from the information Count Márquez had gathered from reliable sources in the Royal Palace.

In other words, the truth was going around the town as a rumour almost unaltered. Needless to say, that was extremely unnatural.

Generally speaking, rumours were greatly exaggerated stories that made the hearer question, where they come from.

When the information was passed on accurately, though, it was more natural to think that someone had a hand in it.

Raffaelo had probably seen some kind of profit in spreading the information about this incident as it was. Count Márquez needed to ask him about that, but for now, he spoke about the official business.

"I did read through the documents once, but let me hear it from you once more. The negotiations with Princess Freya were a success, right?"

The current head of the family addressed him like that, whereupon the successor to the title wiped the smile off his face and assume a stern facial expression.

"Correct. Master Zenjirou and Princess Freya have found a positive consent in regards to a trade agreement between our Carpa Kingdom and the Uppsala Kingdom. The fine details will surely be worked out here in the Capital from now on, but it has already been decided that the agreement will be exclusive to both royal families."

"I see."

The report from Raffaelo prompted Count Márquez to show a grin.

When the intercontinental trade turned into an exclusive business for both royal families before the other nobilities could interfere, then Count Márquez had been right with his speculations.

An exclusive trade agreement between the royal families of both countries meant that only the Carpa Royal Family was allowed to do direct trading with the Uppsala Kingdom, when their ships docked in the harbour of Valentia in the future.

With just that, the royal family would be the clear winner and Count Márquez would have no reason to support the agreement, but there was more to it, of course.

As a country from the North Continent, the Uppsala Kingdom mainly wanted to obtain specialities from the South Continent such as sugar, spices, dragon leather and bones, but it was impossible for the Carpa Royal Family to provide all these export articles by themselves.

So even when the intercontinental trade agreement was "exclusive to both royal families", it only meant that they were the exclusive contact partners for each other. Other influential nobilities still had the opportunity to partake indirectly.

The goal of Count Márquez was to receive preferential treatment for these

opportunities.

Acting in collusion with Queen Aura, Count Márquez had promised his support for the completion of the trade contract in exchange for not getting charged a handling fee by the royal family, so he could basically expect the same profit as with a direct deal.

"You have done well. I will discuss the fine details with Her Majesty Aura. Well, she has to negotiate the trade agreement with Princess Freya at the same time, so it may take some time, but it should not pose a drawback."

"Yes, I am leaving it to you."

The father confidently took up the baton, whereas the son ceded the baton trustingly.

"Good."

Having said this, Count Márquez was a bit sour at heart, even though he did not let it show on his face. His talented son had acted just like he had specified and achieved the very results he had wanted, but the Count was a little bit worried how accustomed his offspring had gotten to leaving the ultimate responsibility and success to someone else, maybe because he had done these kind of jobs for too long.

There was no doubt that his son was gifted, but Raffaelo was already in his thirties. It was about time he stopped being the "obedient son" and slipped more into his role as the "head of an influential family", even if he might screw it up for a bit. Otherwise his father could not free himself from the worry about his succession.

Raising the capable and understanding son uprightly had unfortunately turned him into a man that awaited orders, which made him be unsuitable as the head of a family.

Of course Count Márquez wanted to reeducate him soon, even if it took drastic measures, but he certainly could not use the current matter, a secret agreement with the royal family, for it.

Pushing the concerns over his son to the back of his mind, the Count addressed himself to the problem at hand again.

"I did not go into it earlier, but let me ask now: You are behind the 'faithful rumours' going around in the Capital, are you not?"

Raffaelo affirmed the rhetorical question from his father with a serious expression.

"Yes. I used some of my men to spread them."

"Your reason being?"

His son responded smoothly to his next question as though he had prepared the answer beforehand.

"Simply put, I wanted to avoid 'getting on Master Zenjirou's bad side'. Left alone, the rumours would have surely exaggerated his achievement and that would not have been in his interest."

The response from his son was a bit unexpected, so Count Márquez cocked his head a bit puzzled and asked again.

"Hmm? What do you mean? I do understand that a glorified achievement goes against his will. He is loyal to Her Majesty Aura after all and pays careful attention not to undermine her authority by making a name for himself."

But why would you go out of your way for him? Did he asked you to do that?"

"No. I did it by my own accord."

When his son declared it outright like that, Count Márquez furrowed his brow a bit.

"But why? Just what are you making of Master Zenjirou?"

Raffaelo sat up straight in his chair and took a deep breath before he answered the inquiry of his father.

"Because he is 'terrifying'. Master Zenjirou is a 'monster'."

His expression as he openly admitted that, revealed that he was not joking.

"What do you mean? Explain yourself."

The Prince Consort was passive to no end and showed not the slightest sign of ambition, yet his son had evaluated him as a "monster", so the shrewd count narrowed his eyes to slits.

He would have laughed at anyone else for saying this, but his son had a good insight into human nature.

Pressed for an answer by his father, Raffaelo paused to think for a moment.

"Well, to be honest, all I can think of to describe him is the term monster... And by that, I do not mean his appearance or strength, of course, but his mentality.

More precisely: He is 'different'. It took me a while to notice, because he generally is very mild-mannered, reasonable and does not let any raw emotions show up in his face in public, but you will end up making a fatal mistake, when you take him for an ordinary man."

He laid it on the line for his father.

"Hmm... Well, I do agree with you that his moral values are somewhat peculiar, but I still cannot see why you call him a 'monster'. Are you saying that Master Zenjirou is as formidable as General Puyol or Marquis Ralah?"

Since Count Márquez still cocked his head puzzled, Raffaelo leaned a bit over the table and groped for words.

"Not really. General Puyol has a tenacious mentality on par with a monster, whereas Marquis Ralah has a vigorous mentality on par with a monster, but these are nothing but classifications of intensity.

It is the same as classifying someone as 'superhuman', because he is stronger than a dragon or far taller than average.

In contrast, Master Zenjirou truly has a 'monstrous' mentality. 'Monstrous' in the sense that he might look like a human on a glance, but in reality, his head is just a decoration, his fatal spot is his instep instead and he got an invisible third arm on his back."

When his son illustrated a true monster with grotesque descriptions, Count Márquez cocked his head bewildered altogether. For him it was unthinkable that the completely harmless looking Prince Consort posed such a danger.

"Those, who look ordinary on a glance, are actually the worst of all.

When you were younger, you fought with the sword, right? Please imagine

the following:

You are going against someone that has average strength and no experience with the sword, but is a 'monster' with the features I just mentioned. What would you say are the odds you win that fight?"

The example made no sense, but the Count answered in earnest, when he saw the stern expression of his son.

"Well... It may be a cumbersome fight, but I should be able to defeat him without much difficulty, when his techniques and physique are weak."

Raffaelo seemed to have waited for this answer as he immediately asked back.

"Father, you worked out your chances of success on the 'premise that you knew about' the head being a decoration, the instep being the fatal spot and the invisible third arm on the back, right?"

"Hm? Oh, I see now."

Count Márquez was by no means slow-witted, so he immediately comprehended now what his son wanted to say.

"Yes, you are right. I would be able to win, because I know about the monstrous peculiarities. Without knowing any of it, I would confront the monster like a regular human and believe I had won, when I split its decorative head, but in that moment, I would get killed by the hidden weapon held by the third arm on its back. Considering that, even General Puyol would likely lose against it."

So you are afraid of the fact that no one has an idea about what kind of intellectual attack Master Zenjirou will use or which subject should be avoided with him at all cost."

The son nodded twice relieved, when his father showcased an excellent breadth of mind.

"Yes, indeed. When the nobles talked to Master Zenjirou during parties, I could not help but feel that they were casually touching an ancient dragon all over without knowing, when it would get mad."

Master Zenjirou certainly is mild-mannered and reasonable, but that does not mean he has no emotions. I learned that, when I worked as his assistance in the past month."

During the one month in Valentia, Raffaelo had witnessed how Zenjirou changed, when he could no longer keep his emotions in check.

For example: Zenjirou had been overjoyed, when Princess Freya mentioned the "goats", and he had expressed his interest without thought.

Fortunately it had been the positive emotion called "joy", but it still proved that Zenjirou sometimes based his behaviour on emotions instead of reasoning.

In the same way, it was possible that Zenjirou would dictate a death sentence based on emotion, if something triggered a ruthless anger or hate in him.

But Raffaelo had not the slightest idea "what exactly would trigger anger or hate in Zenjirou".

Affable and a good listener, Raffaelo represented a great conversational partner and he excelled in discerning the feelings and moral values of others. By understanding the unvoiced feelings of his opposite or the words his opposite wanted to hear, Raffaelo could react to it and converse smoothly. It was his worldly wisdom.

But that very worldly wisdom was useless in regards to Zenjirou. Of course it was impossible to discern the feelings or moral values of others as a whole, too, because they all had their own personalities.

It was a completely different matter with Zenjirou, though. Raffaelo had not even the slightest clue, where to start to guess his moral values.

For example: Most young noble men enlisted in the army would be pleased to hear you talking about their bright "future prospects", but would get angry, if you called them a "coward".

Of course there were exceptions to the rule, but in most cases, only a part of the general framework was different, so such a classification could be applied to the majority. On the other hand, when people did not fit into the classification, it often turned out that they lied about their status or occupation.

According to this system from Raffaelo, Zenjirou would be a “young” “royal” “man” “without a job”.

If calling him jobless sounded wrong, you could list “Royalty” or “Prince Consort” as his occupation as well. For Royalty or Nobility, their rank often corresponded to their occupation.

Anyway, the “young male royalty” framework based on Raffaelo’s classification was entirely unsuitable for Zenjirou.

And that would not change, even if you were to change male to female, young to old, royalty to commoner or jobless to farmer/soldier.

Probably what you would expect from someone from a different world. It was impossible to classify him.

“Above all, I was made painfully aware during this incident that he is by no means a ‘puppet of the Queen’ like some nobles describe him behind his back.

He is in possession of a resolute personality and merely acts as the ‘puppet of the Queen’ of his own accord. Or more precisely, he is a ‘self-acting puppet’ rather than a ‘puppet on a string’.”

Some of the nobles, who saw Zenjirou as a puppet on a string, wanted to dethrone Aura and let Zenjirou assume it instead, because they falsely believed that they could control Zenjirou at their convenience, when they got a hold of the strings themselves.

But Raffaelo had learned the truth now. Zenjirou was definitely not the puppet of the Queen. As a proof, he did not hesitate with his decisions in Valentia, even though the Queen had been too far away to give such quick instructions.

If he really were a puppet, he should have been unable to make any calls, when hell suddenly broke loose in Valentia, whereto the instructions of the Queen did not reach in time. But in reality, that did not happen. Zenjirou behaved almost the same as when he acted as the representative of the Queen in the Royal Palace.

That was terrifying above all, because it meant that Zenjirou always kept acting “in the best interests of the Queen” of his own accord and judgement.

For Queen Aura it was like she had another body that produced results on its own with a bare minimum of instructions. Raffaelo was anticipating that her authority would soon become even more consolidated.

He continued with a stern expression.

“Due to that, I suggest we keep our distance from Master Zenjirou until we understand him and his mindset better. It would be dangerous to go against him, of course, but taking his side would be just as dangerous.”

Without knowing the moral values of your opponent, it could prove fatal, when you either went on the offence or tried to appease him.

The word “audacious” would be a compliment for a man, but a woman would be offended by it for sure, whereas the phrase “not being stingy with money” appealed to nobility, but not necessarily to merchants.

“Master Zenjirou was not offended in the slightest, even when his lack for martial arts was pointed out, nor does he shun to obey the instruction of his own wife at all. In my opinion it would be wise not to approach him while we not know what is to his liking or what offends him.”

Raffaelo formulated it as a suggestion, because he himself was going to return home to their domain after this. His father Count Manuel Márquez would be the one to likely come into contact with Zenjirou in the Capital.

“Yes, I understand your concern and you do have a point. For now, I shall only speak to Her Majesty Aura for businesses.”

Even for an old fox like Count Márquez, Queen Aura represented a tough negotiation partner, but at least he knew her cast of mind. Of course he could be outwitted sometimes, but he did not have to worry about waking a sleeping lion by accident.

The son heaved a sigh of relief, when his father was convinced, and nodded briefly.

“Good, that will be sensible.

Also, one last thing. This is just my personal opinion, but I believe we should consider how we can ally with Master Zenjirou as best as possible once we

figure him out to a certain extent.”

Count Márquez widened his eyes a bit, when his son voiced an assertive opinion for once.

“Oho? You mean he is worth the assistance of our family? Is he that competent?”

The son picked his words carefully, when he answered to the words of his father with a slightly brooding expression.

“No, I would not go as far as to say that. He certainly is not incompetent either, though. The reason why I feel it will be profitable for our family to have Master Zenjirou on our side, or rather for our family to side with him, is because it is quite likely that our interests will coincide, even though the interests of royalty and nobility usually oppose each other.”

“Go on.”

When his father urged him to continue with a serious look, the son obediently elaborated his explanation.

“Yes. I had the opportunity to be close to Master Zenjirou for a relatively long time during this incident. Thanks to it, I understand him even less now, but I did manage to confirm a few things.

First off, we erred in our early assumption that he has a good grasp of his emotions and expressions.

I say this, because he prioritized his emotions and decided to obtain the goats as soon as Princess Freya mentioned that she had them onboard.

The reason I had thought he has good control over his emotions was his extremely level-headed attitude, when he acted as a representative for Her Majesty Aura behind the scenes without getting assumptive.

But there is a different explanation for it, when you presume that he cannot control his emotions all that well. Namely that he is not suppressing these emotions but rather feels no dissatisfaction towards his ‘behind-the-scenes position as the Prince Consort’ to begin with.”

“And?”

"Master Zenjirou did end up as the supreme commander in name only for the Pack Dragon Subjugation, but I sensed some 'reluctance' in him, when it happened.

Considering these two points, Master Zenjirou might be a person, who prefers to work behind the scenes despite being royalty and hates to make a name for himself despite being a man.

If that assumption were prove to be true, I dare to say that there is no better person to cooperate with, when we wish to raise the fame of our family in the future."

"Indeed. I see now what you are getting at. It certainly is intriguing, if it is true."

After the lengthy explanation from his son, Count Márquez expressed his consent by nodding strongly without changing his facial expression.

The reasoning from Raffaelo was rather simple. Normally, any nobleman desired to have a chance to stand in the spotlight and make a name for himself. The one to provide these chances was Royalty. And when that Royalty had no intention to keep these chances for himself, he certainly should be a good negotiation partner.

It goes without saying that it was easier to ask a man with no interest in alcohol for the "high quality alcohol" he owned for some reason, rather than an incorrigible alcoholic for his "treasured alcohol".

"Okay. I cannot put our family on the line on account of your opinion alone, of course, but I will keep it in mind. Thanks."

"Yes, Sir. If there is nothing else on the agenda, I plan to return home as soon as the reception party for Princess Freya in the evening is over. Do you mind?"

It seemed that he had gotten his point across to his father, so Raffaelo asked him for his permission to return home with a smile. Strictly speaking, it was not desirable that the current head of the family and its successor were both absent from the domain at the same time like in this case, but in a domain as large as the one from the Márquez Family, there was obviously enough manpower to keep the domain going for half a year, even without its leaders. Still, it never

hurt to have a leader around.

Accordingly, the request from Raffaelo made perfect sense, but contrary to his expectation, his father Count Márquez shook his head.

"I do. Your return will be postpone a bit longer. It has not been officially announced yet, but Puyol Guillén will actually marry soon."

Even in the Royal Palace, this information was not all that widespread, so Raffaelo widened his eyes in surprise, too.

"Oh, about time. Who is the lucky bride?"

"The eldest daughter of the Guzzle Family: Lady Lucinda."

The answer from his father prompted even Raffaelo to be at a loss for words for a moment, then he showed a wry smile and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well... As one might expect of him, I guess? His ambitions still know no limits."

"Yes, he is going to gain a lot, but will also forfeit a lot. At the very least, the Royal Family will be sure keep an eye on him while Her Majesty Aura is still alive.

Well, it is not really our problem. Anyway, I will have you attend his wedding as the representative of our family. Given the circumstances, I would like to choose the partner accompanying you."

"Oh, I see. I assume that this partner is not going to be Mother or Mirela?"

When an unmarried adult man took a woman along to a wedding ceremony, he was practically declaring his intention to bond with that woman to his surroundings, so Raffaelo asked this just in case.

On the other hand, a man with no such partner would ask an already married female relative or a minor girl to be his partner.

By the way, Mirela was the name of Raffaelo's girl cousin.

Count Márquez nodded once in response to his inquiry as if to say that it was self-evident.

"Correct. I mean your fiancée. This has nothing to do with General Puyol. I just

think it is about time that you raise a family yourself, too.

I have narrowed down some candidates for now, but if you have any preferences, I am willing to consider them. Just tell me."

He took charge of the marriage of his son by himself like it was only natural.

Raffaelo, too, was not offended by this and naturally accepted the approach of his father. It was yet again proof how he was still nothing but an "obedient son".

"My fiancée, hmm. Well, I am sure there will be nothing wrong with a woman chosen by you, but since you are asking: My ideal woman is someone like my Stepmother."

Saying this, Raffaelo named his stepmother, who was younger than him by more than five years, as his ideal woman.

The son had just told his father to the face that his second wife was his ideal woman. It was a somewhat awkward joke, but they were on such good terms that it was still understood as a joke. Besides, Lady Octavia was popular enough to make it a convincing argument.

Hearing this, his father gave a broad grin, rejoicing.

"Talk about the impossible now! You will not find another woman like Octavia, not even in our versatile Carpa Kingdom."

"Yeah, I know. But then again, I do not really have any preferences in particular, because whether we will be happy or not in the future depends on the effort my wife-to-be and I put forth, given that there are no faults with her personality or aptitude."

"I see. Then let us go with my top candidate: The second daughter of Baron Massana, Lady Keyshia."

"Lady Keyshia from the Massana Family? We certainly have some connection to them and their domain borders on ours. Our statuses are not really all that ill-matched, either..."

Raffaelo cocked his head unconvinced. While it was true that Massana Family was not a low-ranking family, it could not be considered high-ranking, either.

It technically was a noble family with a domain on its own, but that domain was rather small, so there were plenty of court nobles without a title and domain that possessed more authority than the Massana Family, when they worked in important positions. Baron Massana was such an insignificant feudal lord.

Having said this, he was still a legit feudal lord, so he did have his own land and army. That very land directly bordered on the domain of the Márquez Family, so it was not entirely unprofitable, if their two families were to join up.

But considering the fact that the Márquez Family was undoubtedly one of the ten most influential families in the Carpa Kingdom, it would seem that the Massana Family was a bit too plain for the successor of that very Márquez Family to take their daughter as his legal wife.

Count Márquez preferred stability over chaos and a high return with low risk policy over a low return with high risk policy, so that choice was certainly in line with his moral values, but even then, the return appeared to be somewhat lacking.

He showed a grin to his doubtful son and explained it in the manner of revealing a magic trick.

"Well, you pretty much guessed it already. If your bride were to come from an all too important family, it would be troublesome to bring them under control. There ought to be an unproblematic social distinction between both families."

Moreover, the appeal does not lie in the Massana Family, but in Lady Keyshia herself."

"Right. I have heard of her on numerous occasions. As far as high society is concerned, she is quite the beauty. Though a different type of beauty than my Stepmother."

"Yes. She is not nearly as popular as Octavia, but she is attractive enough that a lot of men do prefer her over Octavia. And seeing as she is five years younger than Octavia, she will only be compared to her in High Society for a short time."

Octavia was the very embodiment of the ideal woman for men in the Carpa Kingdom: Neat, graceful and reserved. Keyshia Massana on the other hand was

an eye-catching beauty, who prided herself with a voluptuous body as well as an alluring face.

Versed in the traditional dance of the Carpa Kingdom, she was allowed to wear the most prominent colour “red”, the symbolic colour of the Carpa Kingdom, as a dancer.

Someone from Modern Earth might be reminded of “Carmen”, if he could see her dance wildly in the red traditional clothes.

“When she is five years younger than my stepmother, then she must have turned twenty this year. I find it a bit hard to believe that a beauty like her is still unmarried at this age. Did Baron Massana delay her marriage as much as possible to gain an advantage?”

If that was the case, his plan proved to be very successful. After all, a marriage with the successor from the Márquez Family happened to come in sight.

But Count Márquez feigned ignorance and continued with unexpected words, when his son made such an assumption.

“No, in her case, it is not a problem that she still is unmarried, even after twenty years. You see, she went into the ‘Inner Palace’ as a ‘waiting maid’ last year. A bit of an advanced age does not get in the way for a waiting maid.”

“...I see now.”

Raffaelo took a breathe and wearily pinched the bridge of his nose with the index finger and thumb of his right hand.

“Father, I believe I just told you that we ought to ‘keep our distance to Master Zenjirou’...”

His son reproached him like that on a rare occasion, whereupon the father shrugged his shoulders with a sniffish look.

“Of course that is what I am going to do. But we are an important family in the Carpa Kingdom and Master Zenjirou is the husband of Her Majesty Aura, so we cannot keep our distance to him forever.

This being the case, we ought to be proactive to some extent and figure out his moral values as soon as possible.”

He made a valid point. At the same time, Count Márquez would never chose a fiancée for his son on the spot. In other words, he has had a candidate in mind from the very beginning and listening to the opinion from Raffaelo just now did not change his view.

Raffaelo himself also had claimed that they “should side with Zenjirou, once they figured out his character”, so he could not reproach him all that harshly.

Meanwhile Count Márquez continued with his explanation.

“Octavia has gone into the Inner Palace numerous times and told me that Master Zenjirou gets along with the waiting maids surprisingly well.”

“You mean he took a waiting maid as a ‘mistress’!?”

That piece of information certainly surprised even Raffaelo. But the answer to that question of his could not have been any more unexpected.

“No, not in the meaning of a ‘mistress’. Not even a single maid is in such a relationship with him, but they are usually very close and the waiting maids perceive him as rather ‘affable’. He seems to be very popular with them as well.

Of course this is not a testimony from the waiting maids, but merely the impression Octavia got by watching them.”

“He is affable to the waiting maids, even though he is not in a relationship with them? So he does like them, yet lays no hands on them? ...To be honest, that only makes me more wary of him. Just what is going on in his head? I cannot comprehend his personality or moral values at all.”

Raffaelo jokingly raised both his arms a bit as if to say that he was at his wit’s end and assumed a surrendering pose.

“Then does it mean that amongst them, Lady Keyshia is a ‘favourite’ to Master Zenjirou?”

“No, unfortunately that is not the case. She simply is the only waiting maid with an appropriate background for the Márquez Family.

Strictly speaking, the daughter of Baron Regalado is an option as well, but you know how peculiar the situation is with that family. It would be dangerous to get involved with them carelessly. Besides, their daughter is a bit too young.

Age-wise, Lady Keyshia is the best match for you.”

“I see.”

In light of the words from his father, Raffaelo pondered with his hand against his chin.

A twenty-year old woman, who was previously praised as a beauty in High Society and was now working as a waiting maid in the Inner Palace.

Her looks were first-grade without doubt and since she was chosen as a waiting maid, there could be no major flaws with her personality, either. At twenty-years old, she was still in the general marriageable prime by a hair’s breath, but that was also no issue at all, considering she spent two years in the Inner Palace.

Before long, Raffaelo reached a conclusion and declared his decision indifferently.

“Understood. I shall meet with Lady Keyshia once, but something unforeseen might prompt me to reject her, so I would like you to refrain from making it definitive for now. You can proceed with the negotiations positively in general, though.”

“Okay. I will make preparations up to the point, where we can announce your engagement at any moment, if you feel like it. If possible, I would like you to take her along to the marriage of General Puyol as your fiancée.”

Count Márquez nodded with a broad smile, when his son answered faithful to his expectations.

*

After their parade, Princess Freya and her entourage entered the Royal Palace and attended a formal ceremony for foreign visitors in the audience room.

Giving them three days to rest in order to relieve the exhaustion they accumulated through the long journey from Valentia to the Capital, the Royal Palace then hosted a night banquet to welcome and entertain Princess Freya and her retainers.

Dressed up men and women had gathered in a large ball room, which was

illuminated by numerous fancy chandeliers and a large number of tall candlesticks, and were conversing merrily.

During the Vibrant Season, the temperatures at noon could already be called “refreshing” rather than “hot” and at night, it became pleasantly cool.

Consequently, the people dressed differently compared to the night banquets of the Hottest Season. The variation in clothes was obviously a lot more multifaceted now. True to the motto of Modern Japanese that fall was the most fashionable season, the temperatures during the Vibrant Season were just about right, so you were neither hot, when you put on a few more layers, nor were you freezing, when you put on a bit less, so it goes without saying that more liberties could be taken with the fashion.

The ladies and gentlemen really went all-out with their dresses, but amongst them, two people still stood out most of all: The honorary guest Princess Freya and the female warrior standing next to her, Victoria Kronkvist aka. Skathi.

In Valentia, Princess Freya had cross-dressed most of the time, since she was acting in her role as the captain of the “Yellow Leaves”, but she was wearing the proper dress of a princess right now.

Her light-blue dress had been brought along from the faraway Uppsala Kingdom. Its design was rather simple, keeping lace or other decorations to a bare minimum, but on a closer look, you noticed a blue sapphire, the exclusive decoration of the royal family of the Uppsala Kingdom, worked into it and an elegant style that was plenty of eye-catching in itself.

Moreover, the owner of that dress was an unfathomable beauty with short blue-tinted silver hair and ice-blue eyes.

She had skin so white that it looked unrealistic to the people of the South Continent, and her standing figure was stunning beyond nature.

Attracting the gazes of everyone, not just the men, Princess Freya kept on smiling, even when she heard the whispered gossip from around her. As a natural-born princess, she must have been used to stand in the spotlight.

The chandeliers projected countless shadows onto the red carpet while she advanced over it in the traditional manner of her motherland.

The culture of the Carpa Kingdom generally considered it bad manners, when someone of lower status called out to someone of higher status first.

Having been told of this in advance, Princess Freya wanted to melt the ice by opening a conversation herself, so she looked around smiling, but a silhouette approached her before she could act.

"Why, good evening, Princess of the North. May I have the pleasure of making your acquaintance?"

A young man with blonde hair and green eyes, wearing something like a dark purple tuxedo like a glove, casually called out to her with a smile and no sense of tension.

Behind him followed a young woman with auburn hair, clad in a light purple dress.

"Yes, of course. May I have your name, please?"

Princess Freya responded with a smile like that, although she already had an idea, who the man and woman were that stood before her.

"Thank you. My name is Francesco. I am the eldest son of the Crown Prince of the Sharro Royal Family from the Twin Kingdom of Sharro and Jilbell."

"My name is Bona. I hail from the same Sharro Royal Family."

When Prince Francesco and Princess Bona announced their affiliation with the Twin Kingdom of Sharro and Jilbell, the major power ruling over the central part of the South Continent, Princess Freya also gave her name as the representative of her homeland, the Uppsala Kingdom, with a smile and her head raised.

"Thank you for your polite introduction. I am Freya, the eldest daughter of Gustav V, the King of the Uppsala Kingdom. This is my trusted retainer Victoria Kronkvist also known as Skathi."

"..."

Standing at attention behind Princess Freya, the tall female warrior wordlessly lowered her head in acknowledgement, as the fellow royalty introduced each other.

By the way, Skathi was not armed, as might be expected. She had taken off her leather armour for something like a blue military uniform with silver embroidery. Below it she actually wore something feminine, namely a skirt, but on a closer look, the short skirt with a deep slit at the side turned out to have some kind of short trousers sewed in beneath it.

That kind of outfit enabled her to move around as good as in normal trousers, if necessary, but still gave off a feminine impression at the same time. Maybe this was actually the dress uniform for female soldiers in the Uppsala Kingdom.

“That’s what I call a tall and reliable bodyguard. Hello there.”

Anyway, Prince Francesco seemed to have understood the unspoken intention from Skathi to be nothing more than a bodyguard for Princess Freya here, so he only called out to her once with a silly smile and then shifted his attention back to Princess Freya.

“Let me call you Princess Freya then. But I have to say, it’s my first time meeting someone from the North Continent, so I’m quite excited, if you will forgive my saying so. Would you tell me more about your culture?”

Prince Francesco could consort most familiar with someone he met for the first time without making that person feel enraged. That ability of his might be even more abnormal than his ability to control the bloodline magic of two different royal families.

Standing behind him, Princess Bona was sweating bullets under her forced smile, but Princess Freya showed no sign of being offended by the blatant attitude of the foreign prince, and replied with a smile.

“Yes, as long as time allows it, gladly. I am ashamed to admit this, but I actually have never heard of the Twin Kingdom of Sharow and Jilbell before coming to the South Continent.

I would appreciate it, if you could tell me about it as well.”

“Why, yes! I say it’s only natural to not have heard of it on the North Continent. I mean, our kingdom is located in the central part of the South Continent and has no connection to the sea. We practically have zero contact with the North Continent.”

"I see. Thank you for enlightening me. But then again, you two look a lot more like us rather than the people of the Carpa Kingdom."

Her sceptis was understandable. People on the South Continent generally had darker skin, even considering nuances, but Prince Francesco and Princess Bona had exceptional fair white skin.

They resembled Princess Freya and Skathi so much that someone clueless would immediately believe it, when he was told that the four of them came from the same country.

Francesco smiled frivolously to the reference from Princess Freya

"Oh, that's probably because our ancestors were settlers from the North Continent. By now, the blood has mingled with the one from the South Continent, so some royalty or nobles do tend to look like the natives here, but the majority of them still looks like Bona and me."

and revealed some personal information.

"Oh, really now. I see."

Princess Freya appeared to be impressed, but she contemplated the contrary point of what she had heard just now at heart.

It was not unthinkable that they still looked nothing like the natives, even after numerous generations. The term "settlers" suggested that they had been more than just one or two people, so it was quite plausible that they refrained from mingling with the natives in order to protect the bloodline magic.

While preserving the bloodline magic like that, they unintentionally happened to preserve their appearance as well.

The problematic part was that fact that the Twin Kingdom, the place where they settled, was located deep in the inner land with no connection to the sea.

Needless to say, you could only migrate from the North Continent to the South Continent by boat. Regardless of how many years ago it happened, the ancestors of the Twin Kingdom ought to have arrived on the continent by the sea first.

Despite that, the Twin Kingdom was a completely landlocked country in the

central part of the South Continent now. Of course it was possible that it was the result of repeated expansions and surrenders of land in all the years.

But that made no sense either, considering the fact that the current Twin Kingdom was a major power known for their “domination over the central part of the South Continent”. The creature known as human could generally forget about taking something unrightfully, but never forgot about having something taken away from him unrightfully.

Assuming the Twin Kingdom has had a coastline in their territory once upon a time, someone would have definitely demanded to “reclaim the lost land”.

Then Princess Freya suddenly thought of another possibility. She kept her smile under perfect control and asked.

“So I can take it that the members of the other royal family in the Twin Kingdom, namely the Jilbell Royal Family, also look like you?”

“Yes, indeed. Of course each family has its own distinct features, but overall, we all do not look all that different from people of the North Continent.”

When Prince Francesco answered her casually like that, Princess Freya started to harbour another doubt at heart.

(Two royal families with a bloodline magic each migrated to the South Continent as one group? Moreover, they did not separate ways then, but founded a single country together? That seems rather unnatural.)

Under normal circumstances, a royal family with a bloodline magic was prone to cling to their sovereignty. Princess Freya was unable to rule it out completely, since she did not know about every kingdom that once existed on the North Continent, but at the very least, she could not think of a country that would apply to the Sharow Family and Jilbell Family while they were still on the North Continent.

When a royal family possessed such a convenient bloodline magic like the Bestowal Magic or Healing Magic, some stories about them were bound to be remaining, even if they had perished.

(Well, a bloodline magic is not everything, when it comes to the power of the state, so it would not be all that strange, when a dynasty or two perished

without entering the history books. Even less so, when that dynasty did not actually perish, but just moved over to the South Continent...)

The possibilities were endless, so Princess Freya concluded that it was pointless to muse about it any further right now. She pushed the thought to the back of her mind and breached a casual topic instead.

"I envy the South Continent for its variety of dragons. It has been my first time riding a dragon carriage. To my shame, I must confess that I was overexcited much like a child."

The topic must have been appealing to Prince Francesco as well. The blond prince jumped at the chance at once.

"Yes, I recall that the North Continent has very few dragons. Here, even the same species can be quite different, depending where they come from. Most of the Raptorial Dragon from around here are green and resilient against heat, but in our Twin Kingdom they generally have a fawn colour and can cope with dry air."

"Is that so? That is quite the difference, considering it is the same continent."

"Yes. The culture varies in the west and central part, too. Not only is the architecture quite different, the atmosphere in the cities is something else entirely."

"That is really fascinating."

From that point on, Princess Freya and Prince Francesco exchanged experiences about their respective cultures.

After a while,

"Here come Her Majesty Aura and Master Zenjirou!"

a voice echoed through the large hall, heralding the entry of the Queen of the Carpa Kingdom and her husband.

"Prince Francesco, Princess Bona, you will have to excuse me. I need to bid Her Majesty Aura and His Majesty Zenjirou welcome."

Hearing that Aura and Zenjirou were coming, Princess Freya bowed herself off from the prince and princess of the Twin Kingdom and was about to leave.

"Oh, then let's go together. We have to greet them as well."

"Indeed. If you do not object, Princess Freya, please let us accompany you."

Prince Freya had no real reason to turn down the request from the prince and princess to go along with her. They were in the same boat in regards to an obligatory greeting to the host, namely the royal couple.

"Very well. Let us go then."

With a smile, she allowed them to tag along with her.

"Your Majesty Aura, Your Majesty Zenjirou. I owe you a debt of gratitude for holding this wonderful party for my sake today. I, Freya Uppsala, yield you my thanks as the representative of the delegation from the Uppsala Kingdom."

Freya Uppsala expressed her gratitude with a beautiful and clear pronunciation and swept a curtsy by holding on to the hem of her dress and lowering her head a bit.

Accepting the courtesy from the princess of the North Continent, Queen Aura threw out her voluminous chest and nodded generously.

"It appears you relieved the exhaustion from your long journey all right. The banquet tonight is held to welcome you with open arms. Enjoy it to the fullest."

"The party is unceremoniously, so I hope you can relax and enjoy it, Princess Freya."

"Yes, thank you very much."

When Aura and Zenjirou answered her, she bowed in a manner that was obviously different from the etiquette on the South Continent. There was no doubt, though, that the unfamiliar motion was something extremely graceful.

Zenjirou had gotten quite used to conduct himself as royalty in the past one and a half year, but needless to say, he was still not at the level of a natural-born royalty like Aura.

Thus, he basically let Queen Aura take the lead and just stood by her side on occasions like this. Normally, he would have to stand behind her, but the Carpa Kingdom was patriarchal inclined. Even if he was the husband of the ruling Queen, people would not shut up about it, when a man stood behind a woman.

"You have been in our country for over a month already, but came to the Capital only recently. The food here is obviously quite different from Valentia, where you have stayed for a long time.

I am sure that there will be some cuisines not to your liking, because of our cultural differences, but I hope you can enjoy it nevertheless."

"Yes, I already had the pleasure of trying some of them, Your Majesty. The cooking here is quite piquant."

"Oh? Unfortunately, I have never tasted the cooking from the North Continent myself, so I cannot really tell, but I guess it really is different?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. The North Continent has no dragons as livestock, so the meat is always from goats, cows and pigs. In case of our Uppsala Kingdom, we have the meat from reindeers as well. Surprisingly enough, the vegetables are more or less the same, but the seasoning is the most crucial difference.

We have no cuisines on the North Continent, which uses spices or sugar bountiful."

The culinary art livened up the casual conversation between Queen Aura and Princess Freya, true to the function of an appetizer. Food and clothes were relatively safe topics, so they were often used as a common theme for conversations like this one.

By the look of it, Aura would have no problem attending to Princess Freya by herself for a while.

With that in mind, Zenjirou took a look around. As if he had waiting for that moment, the blonde man in the purple outfit showed a friendly smile and called out to him.

"Hey, it has been a while, Your Majesty Zenjirou. As you can see, I already treated myself to one."

Saying this, the blonde man— Prince Francesco raised his silver goblet that was filled with a cocktail based on the distilled liquor.

"I am glad to see you again, Your Majesty Zenjirou. Thank you very much for inviting us tonight."

The chaperone for Prince Francesco, Princess Bona appeared from behind him with these words.

As always, her characteristically wavy and auburn hair was sprinkled with silver dust. The simple light purple dress she was wearing suited her well and fit into the ambience all right, but Zenjirou remembered that her outfit and hairstyle were practically always the same. Of course the dress itself was always a different one, but the simple one-piece design in a light purple colour never changed.

He somewhat got the impression that Princess Bona wanted to expend as little effort as possible for fashion.

Anyway, seeing as the prince and princess of the Twin Kingdom had greeting him in person, Zenjirou had to return the favour as well.

“Good evening, Prince Francesco, Princess Bona. Yes, please enjoy yourself.”

His wife was taking care of the honorary guest Princess Freya, so Zenjirou gave his attention to Prince Francesco and Princess Bona for now.

Practically his equals, Zenjirou was already somewhat familiar with them, so he could deal with them relatively stressless.

Thus he talked to them in a relaxed manner.

“By the way, is it just me, or are you wearing this for the first time, Prince Francesco?”

“I knew I could count on you to notice it! That’s the new shirt I had ordered here in the Capital.”

Saying this, Prince Francesco proudly pointed not at his purple tuxedo jacket, but at the white shirt beneath it.

Zenjirou definitely deserved praise for recognizing the shirt as new, seeing as it was only showing for bit at the neck line of the jacket.

Having said this, he had only noticed it because of the “four-hole buttons” on it, not because he had a keen eye for fashion.

Whether it was the same for the North Continent or not, these “four-hole buttons” were a fairly uncommon sight on the South Continent at least. The

purveyors to the court had keenly discerned them on the clothes Zenjirou had brought along and with his permission, they had started to copy them, so every shirt with four-hole buttons was new without doubt.

The general button was a pricey kind of ornament, except for the simple wooden ones, so most of them were fancy and extravagant like brooches, decorating the clothes of royalty and nobility.

"These buttons are quite fascinating. Its flat surface allows you to wear them even underneath without hindrance and they stick firmly to the clothes, since they were sewed on through four holes.

When I think about it, it's quite the simple idea, but I am still impressed."

After Prince Francesco said this, Princess Bona joined the conversation a bit curiously, despite usually staying in the background.

"Are these buttons made out of dragon bones? They certainly look simple, but it can by no means be an easy task to flatten them to that extent and open four holes so near each other without breaking it. And considering that a thread is going through these holes, you have to properly polish the holes or the thread will tear while you thread it in."

Her interest apparently did not stem from its decorative value, but rather from the technique to manufacture it.

(Now that I think about it, it's a bit strange. She loves jewellery, yet has no interest in dressing herself up. I guess her sphere of interest is rather small? The one from Prince Francesco strikes me as too broad, though.)

While these thoughts crossed his mind, Zenjirou responded to the prince and princess.

"Yes. The result is simple indeed, but it actually requires even more skill to make one than the normal decorative button. But I'd like to think that it would not prove difficult for the two of you?"

"Well, yeah. It might be worthwhile to make them out of metal like silver or copper, too. These materials dull more easily, so it requires intense care, but that way, you grow an attachment for it."

"I think I will try to make them out of the 'corals' I received from you, Your Majesty Zenjirou. It should prove to be a practical, but pretty ornament, when I shape the red corals into a flower and open four holes in the middle of it."

As long as it was novel, Prince Francesco displayed an interest in about anything, whereas Princess Bona's interest was only piqued, when it concerned jewellery.

Zenjirou was glad to see that they both delved into the subject, but when Princess Bona mentioned the souvenir corals, he felt a conscience-stricken pain in his chest, but forced himself to smile on the surface.

(Sorry. To be honest, it wasn't from me, but from Ines...)

Forced to return home at once due to the unexpected happenings at Valentia, Zenjirou had been unable to buy the souvenirs he had promised to them.

Later on, he had sent a "Small Flying Dragon" to the waiting maid Ines, who had still been in Valentia, and had her buy the corals and pearls in his stead. Both Prince Francesco and Princess Bona had been delighted at the souvenirs, but Zenjirou felt a bit guilty.

Nevertheless, he could not really talk about that, so he went along with their conversation, feigning innocence.

"Oh, that sounds great. What do you think of trying other materials besides the corals? I am not an expert on the matter, but would not amber or jade work as well?"

"What a wonderful idea! Ah, but when you are going as far as using such beautiful stones, it might be more worthwhile to process them into the usual large decorative buttons rather than into these inconspicuous buttons. Ah, but it could be considered more fancy, if you dare to use a precious stone as a concealed button..."

Princess Bona was usually introverted, but she, too, came out of her shell, when jewellery was mentioned. So far, so good, but she would then lose all moderation and never come to an end.

Zenjirou decided it would be dangerous to continue the topic any further, so he broke off the conversation about the buttons and started to push for a

different topic.

"Reminds me, you came over together with Princess Freya. Do you already have made an acquaintance with her?"

"Yes. We have been talking with her before you came."

"She was so kind to entertain us after the introductions."

Princess Freya must have heard their answers. Her conversation with Queen Aura had just come to a halt, so she butted into their conversation with a smile.

"Indeed. I had the pleasure to strike up an acquaintance with them. The stories about the Twin Kingdom have been extremely intriguing to me, since I was born in the north."

"Oh please, your stories about the North Continent have been quite entertaining, too. I would love to hear more at a later date, when you have time."

"Oh my, I would be glad to, Prince Francesco."

Unlike Prince Francesco, Princess Freya seemed to imply more than mere curiosity, but no one was touching upon that.

With an innocence smile like a child, Prince Francesco carried on.

"Thank you, Princess Freya. Oh, right. I hope His Majesty Zenjirou can participate then, too."

Did you know that His Majesty is very erudite, Princess Freya? It was him, who made the drink in Lady Skathi's goblet. Am I right, Your Majesty Zenjirou?"

For some reason, the prince proudly announced that, whereupon Zenjirou grinded his teeth, annoyed with his unnecessary meddling, but he had not really been keeping the distilled liquor a secret to begin with.

"Well, yes. I certainly did make it, but calling me erudite is giving me too much credit."

He tried to brush aside the subject humbly, but perceptive as she was, Princess Freya obviously did not let that happen.

"Oh my, is that so? So you are versed in making 'distilled liquor'."

She raised an affected voice of surprise, where as Skathi behind her widened her eyes genuinely surprised and stared at the goblet in her hand.

Queen Aura discerned that she needed to help out, so she naturally applied herself

“Going by your phrasing, I take it that ‘distilled liquor’ is nothing uncommon on the North Continent?”

by asking that.

The silver-blue-haired princess answered the question from the red-haired queen without delay.

“Yes. The North Continent has it as well. Having said this, it was only developed relative recently, so I would not really call it common yet.”

Aura suspected that Princess Freya was definitely more wary of Zenjirou now and attached importance to him, even if she did not let it show on her face.

The people on the North Continent prided themselves on having more advanced technology than the South Continent. So when they heard that someone from the South Continent had implemented something that was still considered a novel technique on the North Continent, even if it was nothing but a luxury good like alcohol, their evaluation and wariness towards that someone was bound to rise.

“I see. Then I would love to hear your honest opinion on it. We are still only making a small amount of it right now, but we would like to expand the business to a national scale in the future.”

Aura asked for her help without turning a hair, but Princess Freya regretfully shrugged her shoulders a bit.

“My apologies. I have barely ever tasted it, since the alcohol is too strong for me. My Skathi here should be more familiar with it, though. Am I right, Skathi?”

Suddenly addressed, the female bodyguard flinched surprised for a second, but Skathi was still her trusted retainer and bodyguard.

Used to being asked for her opinion by superiors at places like this one, she answered in a flat voice without any tension or excitement.

"Hmm, I recognize the distilled liquor I just had as a freshly distilled alcohol mixed with fruit juice.

Of course there is nothing wrong with drinking it like that, but on the North Continent, we let it rest in wooden barrels for a few years. It thus grows richer in colour, flavour and taste."

"Oh, you mean maturation."

Zenjirou inadvertently spoke his mind, when Skathi gave that advice.

Apparently, the North Continent had developed the technique to age distilled liquor by storing it for a long time, like it was the case with whiskey or brandy.

"Mh? You already knew of it, Zenjirou?"

Queen Aura asked disappointed, whereupon Zenjirou quickly explained himself.

"Ah, no. I only knew that such a method existed, but not how to actually implement it."

Although he did know that it involved putting the distilled alcohol into wooden barrels and letting it rest, he had no idea how to go about it in detail. For example, what kind of wood should be used for the wooden barrels? And he did hear that whiskey barrels were charred on the inside, but to what extent? Also, were there other factors to take into consideration?

It would require a lot of trial-and-errors to ascertain that. But the maturation process took years, so it would take at least a century to develop the method through trial-and-error.

Zenjirou had not been that desperate for it, so he had put it on the back burner for now, but he probably should explain all this to Aura once they were back in the Inner Palace.

Standing diagonally across from him, Princess Freya narrowed her ice-blue eyes to slits and smiled at Zenjirou while these thoughts crossed his mind.

"You really do know a lot, Your Majesty Zenjirou. As Prince Francesco has suggested, I certainly would like to have a talk with you in peace at some point."

"Definitely. We are bound to meet for the transfer of the goats down the

road, so if you like, we can talk then.”

Zenjirou fended off her aggressive approach like that, but as though he had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, Prince Francesco declared loudly.

“Eh? But then I won’t be able to talk to you. Your Majesty Zenjirou, please hang out with me, too, afterwards.”

The night banquet was kept rather lax, but even then, the utterance from Prince Francesco was barely acceptable. As such, Princess Bona lost all the zestful colour she had in her face and pulled the prince at his sleeve with all her might.

“P-Prince Francesco!”

Fortunately enough, everyone present seemed to posses a generous heart, so no one frowned at his mannerless outburst.

But Queen Aura shattered that desire of his for a different reason than its rudeness.

“I am afraid that your wish will go unfulfilled, Prince Francesco. My husband is schedule to leave the palace for some business as my representative.”

“Eh, again!?”

When the Queen revealed this, only Prince Francesco voiced his dismay, but Princess Bona and Princess Freya looked surprised all the same.

Zenjirou was the Prince Consort, but he had only left the Capital once so far, namely for the matter with Princess Freya in Valentia.

In other words, it was easily conceivable that something must be happening in the borderland soon that was equally important as the visit from Princess Freya.

“Where are you headed, Your Majesty Zenjirou?”

“Well, you see...”

Seeing that her husband had doubts whether he was allowed to mention it or not, the Queen at his side helped him out.

“My husband is going to the March of Guzzle. This is still confidential, so

please keep it to yourself. The marriage ceremony of a prominent figure of our Kingdom will be held there.”

Aura lowered her voice on purpose as she said that, but the “confidential” part was a lie, of course.

Strictly speaking, the marriage between General Puyol and Lucinda Guzzle had admittedly not been announced to the public yet, but it was actually a so-called “open secret” that had gotten around to the point, where almost all the nobles, who frequented the Royal Palace, already knew about it.

Since it was not officially announced yet, it was not okay to broadcast the story everywhere, but even if you were to do so, there was not really a law against it, nor a punishment as a matter of course.

Otherwise, Aura would have never mentioned it to royalties from different countries in this place, where who knows might be eavesdropping.

Nevertheless, it was exciting to have a “secret talk”, even if it was just for show.

Princess Freya flushed her snow-white face a bit and leaned a bit forward.

“Oh my, a marriage ceremony? In view of the fact that you mentioned the March of Guzzle, is it possible that Sir Xavier is getting married?”

Having been involved in the Pack Dragon ruckus in Valentia, she had met with Xavier Guzzle in person, making a casual acquaintance. He was one of the few contacts she had, since Princess Freya had only arrived in the Carpa Kingdom a few months ago.

“No, it is not his wedding. The eldest daughter of the Guzzle Family, Lady Lucinda will be getting married. She will wed General Puyol, the current head of the Guillén Family.”

The name mentioned in Aura’s explanation was not unfamiliar to Princess Freya either.

She had heard of his name in terms of an intermittent leader for the Pack Dragon Subjugation and during the month-long stay in the Residence of the Duke of Valentia, the gossip about the top general of the Carpa Kingdom did go

around as well.

When the marriage concerned a significant general of the country, it certainly made sense that the Prince Consort attended it as the representative for the Queen.

Convinced like that, Princess Freya quickly wracked her brain and reached a bold conclusion.

"I do have a connection to the Guzzle Family as well."

Your Majesty Zenjirou, would you please allow me to accompany you to the marriage ceremony?"

Five royalties from three different royal families were making conversation here. People were sure to have listened in on them.

As soon Princess Freya made that bold request, the ball room fell so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

Queen Aura clicked her tongue at heart, when all the gazes were turned to them, but corrected the princess from the North Continent with a calm tone.

"Princess Freya, you may not know about it, but here on the South Continent, it often signifies a deep relationship, when you attend a marriage ceremony together with a woman, who is not related by blood."

I am sure you said it unsuspectingly, but are you not being a bit too thoughtless here?"

The warning from the Queen was recited calmly, but had a touch of intimidation. Nevertheless, Princess Freya did not even bat an eye.

On the contrary, she intensified her smile and

"Oh my, is that so? Then it is 'just the same as on the North Continent'.

Then let me say it again: Your Majesty Zenjirou, I would like to attend the marriage ceremony as your partner. Would you please consider it?"

declared this with a purposefully loud voice, so that everyone in the hall could hear it.

Then she held onto the hem of her dress with both hands, swept an

exceptional curtsy and lowered her head so low that her neck became visible.

“!?”

The female bodyguard standing at attention behind her gasped in surprise.

Skathi was the only person here, who knew the meaning behind that behaviour. The act of sweeping an exceptional curtsy while lowering the head deeply, was used by the women of the North Continent, when they proposed to a man.

Chapter 03: The Perspective of Princess Freya

The course of action Zenjirou and Aura took after the night banquet had already become a routine to them.

They cast off their official attire in the living room of the Inner Palace and went straight to the bath, then they washed off the perfumed oil and sweat with plenty of soap.

Following that, they bathed in the warm water to relieve their fatigue. After that they put on their nightwear and returned to the living room.

There they took cold water and fruit juice from the refrigerator and wetted their parched throats.

Before getting ready to go to bed then, the royal couple sat across each other on the couches and held a “debriefing” of the night banquet.

“Well, I must admit that I was really surprised by what happened at the night banquet.”

Sitting on the black leather couch, the Queen broached the subject with a weary tone for once.

“Ah, yeah. It really came out of nowhere. Actually, I would’ve never attended the banquet, if I have had even the slightest clue about it beforehand, no matter how much you had insisted.”

Zenjirou, too, said this with the same weary voice, but the irritation displayed on his face was even more obvious.

The surprise they spoke of was nothing less than the factual proposal from Freya Uppsala, the first princess of the Uppsala Kingdom.

“She said it so assertive in front of everyone. It leaves no room for interpretation.”

Aura heaved a sigh while she rubbed her temples with the thumb and middle

finger of her right hand as if smoothing a headache.

“Ehm, you mean, it’s already an established fact that I’ll take Princess Freya with me to the wedding of General Puyol?”

Zenjirou asked timidly, like poking into a brush to check for a snake, whereupon the Queen shook her head.

“Not that. I mean that there is literally no room for interpretation about her request to you to take her with you to the wedding ceremony.

We cannot pretend it never happened. If we were to refuse her request, it would amount to an official rejection of a formal request.”

The vast majority of negotiations between nobility and royalty were generally decided in preliminary negotiations, namely in secret talks. When these preliminary negotiations failed, both side “pretended it never happened” as a rule, so that their images came to no harm in public. It did leave an unpleasant emotional aftertaste to both parties, though.

But this time, the matter had suddenly been brought up in public first without any of these advance talks.

Due to that, there was no option to sweep the current matter under the carpet.

Zenjirou was perfectly aware of the situation he was in, so his face lost all colour, when he heard that explanation.

“Wait? Am I already done for? There’s no way I can refuse this, is there?”

“If we want to refuse it, we need to be prepared to give up on the intercontinental trade agreement.

We would be able to write it off as rude, if they wanted a bride or groom for their family without preliminary discussions, but she is supposed to marry into our family here.

Moreover, she wants to marry you, the Princess Consort, and not the Monarch. Not to mention that she is a first princess, who inherited the legitimate bloodline of the current king. She surely knows that I, the Queen, will not give up the position of the legal wife, which in turn means that she intends

to become a concubine.

From a political point of view, it is almost impossible to turn down such a convenient marriage proposal. The only reason to turn it down would be that a royal marriage involving another country goes against the tradition.”

“What? It does?”

For a moment, Zenjirou cocked his head puzzled, but recalled the fact soon after.

On the South Continent, being a member of a royal family equalled being a practitioner of a bloodline magic, so the royal blood was generally not passed on outside the country. It was fundamentally different from the common practice during Medieval Europe or Sengoku Japan in that regard.

The bloodline was only inherited within the own country. Political marriages between different countries were basically non-existent.

Under special circumstances, Zenjirou had priorly received an indirect marriage proposal from the Sharow Family of the Twin Kingdom of Sharow and Jilbell, so the common sense of the South Continent had slipped his mind for a moment.

“So it’s possible the matter will be dropped due to opposition from our own nobles?”

Seeing a glimmer of hope, Zenjirou leaned forward on the couch as he asked it, but the Queen once again shook her head expressionless.

“No. The nobles will protest without doubt, but not in the way you hope for.

They will probably protest about the fact that you ought to take a concubine from our country first before accepting the princess from a different country. You might even get additional requests, when you take her to the wedding ceremony.”

“Additional? You mean I can take numerous partners to the ceremony?”

The Queen responded to the surprised Zenjirou at once.

“Yes, there are not many cases of it, but it is not forbidden per se. It is normal for high-class nobles to have numerous wives, so it does happen that they take

a few of them along at the same time.

Well, it usually is just one woman for one man, since it is called a ‘partner’.”

Hence a man with numerous wives had to agonize over whom to take along to the ceremony. Of course the legal wife obtained priority, but the concubines would sulk, if the legal wife was given the priority all the time. Even if he were to take them one by one, there would arise disparities such as taking one woman to the marriage of a baron, but another to the marriage of a count.

But when he tried to be fair and always took all of them along, the ceremony was akin to a battlefield.

Thus, the invitation to a marriage ceremony was a sore point for a man with multiple wives.

“Scary...”

Faced with the prospect to have to take a second wife at the very moment, Zenjirou unconsciously breathed what was on his mind.

The flustered one was Aura, though.

“No, Zenjirou, you got it wrong. That was only a worst case example. Not every man with numerous wives has to go through that.”

The relationship between the co-wives will admittedly not be harmonious all the time, but strictly speaking, any human relationship will be more or less like that.

As a matter of fact, there are very few incidents that escalate into bloodshed.”

Seeing how her husband went paler with every word from her, Aura declared with a resolute tone in order to erase his fear and anxiety.

“Oh, please. It will be fine. Just leave it to me!”

When you will have to take in concubines, I will take responsibility and keep them in check. Be it a princess from another country or the daughter of an influential noble, I will thoroughly drive the hierarchy and rules of the Inner Palace home to them and teach them not to cause problems to you.”

When Aura thrusted her clenched fist out and proclaimed passionately, Zenjirou burst out in laughter.

"Wow, what a reliable wife I have."

"Yes, you can count on me."

She was technically suggesting to use force, but in practice, that might actually be a good measure.

With Zenjirou being the Prince Consort and Aura being the Queen, they were a married couple with reversed roles. When he now added concubines to that, the hierarchy among Aura and the other concubines was pretty much set in stone.

In that case, they might as well address that hierarchy from the very beginning and let the concubine realize that they were subjects of Queen Aura before they were the wives of Prince Consort Zenjirou. By doing so, the peace in the Inner Palace could be kept.

"Anyway, you better assume that you have no way to refuse her as a partner for the marriage ceremony. It does not necessarily mean that she will become your concubine at the same time, but to be honest with you, the probability of that happening is quite high, so prepare yourself."

Zenjirou looked at the ceiling on that ultimatum.

"Okay... Man, and here I had hoped to bluff it out by asking Mrs. Pascuala to be my partner."

"You would practically ask for trouble, if you were to refuse Prince Freya in this situation and take Beldam Pascuala as your partner instead."

"...Right."

Pascuala was an elder woman of over seventy years-old and the wife of the Royal Archmage Espiridión.

When a married man was invited to a marriage ceremony, he generally asked a related woman, when his wife was prevented for any reason, but Zenjirou had no relatives here. They were in a different world, in Japan, and Aura was the sole survivor of her family.

In such a case, one usually took a married female acquaintance along as the partner, so Zenjirou had wanted to ask Pascuala to assume that role.

According to that, his private tutor Lady Octavia would be a possible candidate, too, but even though she was already married, she was a young beauty. If he were to invite her carelessly, he could come under suspicion of being wolfish, so they had cast away that idea.

At any rate, there was no way to gloss over the matter to begin with, since a high-ranking personality in the form of a foreign princess made a clear request at an official event.

"Anyway, we still do not know what she wants from us. Depending on that, we might have to refuse her, even if it costs us the intercontinental trade agreement."

"By the way, what happens if her terms are reasonable?"

"In that case, well, I will do my best to preserve your peaceful life in the Inner Palace."

"...Thanks."

Although the Queen answered earnestly, she averted her eyes from him. Zenjirou could only give her a word of thanks as he heaved a deep sigh.

*

Around the same time, Princess Freya and Skathi had returned from the night banquet to their room in the Royal Palace and were discussing the results of tonight's banquet as well.

The whole adjacent building in the Royal Palace was currently rented out to Princess Freya and her company and numerous soldiers of the Uppsala Kingdom were guarding it. In the room furthest in the back, Princess Freya had changed into casual clothes and was sitting mannerly on the couch.

"Good job tonight, Skathi. The South Continent sure is something. Even this late at night without a fire, we can dress so lightly and not freeze."

She wore a plain white one-piece dress with half-sleeves and it was currently the beginning of the latter half of the Vibrant Season, which would be January

in terms of the Earth calendar.

In the Uppsala Kingdom on the North Continent, you would still freeze around this time of the year, even if you wore thick clothes and heated up the fireplace to the maximum, so Princess Freya could not help but feel alienated by this comfortable temperature that allowed her to wear just a thin one-piece dress with half-sleeves at night.

The tall female warrior Skathi had also changed into casual clothes, just like her master, and she responded to her master while she sat duly on the couch across from her.

"Indeed. But I am grateful for it. If I had to wear a fur against the cold, it would obstruct my foot-and spearwork. I can live up to my full potential in these kind of clothes."

Skathi wore a grey attire similar to a sweatshirt and sweat pants. Her beloved spear with the tusk of a Sea Elephant was leaning against the couch she was sitting on, so she was ready to jump into action at any moment.

They had been welcomed with open arms, but this was still the Royal Palace of a foreign country. As a bodyguard, Skathi never lowered her guard completely, just in case.

"I put my life into your hands, Skathi. I doubt it will ever be necessary, because the higher ups of this kingdom, such as Her Majesty Aura and His Majesty Zenjirou, are quite level-headed, but I am counting on you, if anything happens."

"Yes, you honour me."

The silver-haired princess smiled dearly, whereas the blonde female warrior kept a serious expression, but softened the look in her eyes a bit as she lowered her head.

Skathi considered Princess Freya as a master worthy of her loyalty and her affection for her was so strong that she was even willing to give her life in order to protect her.

But for that very reason, she also considered it her duty to question her master for her intentions, when she did something incomprehensible, or advise

her, when she felt something amiss.

The serious-looking female warrior looked her master straight into the eyes and asked with a sharp tone.

"Milady, I am firmly convinced that you always act with a solid plan in mind. But to be honest, I cannot comprehend your behaviour at the night banquet earlier at all. If you please, do tell me your intentions."

At the night banquet earlier, Princess Freya had asked Zenjirou to take her along as his partner to the marriage ceremony. Skathi was aware that she had been the most surprised by this.

One reason for her surprise had been the action Princess Freya had taken for it: That motion was used in the Uppsala Kingdom, when a "woman proposed marriage". Even if no one on the South Continent knew the meaning behind it, Princess Freya was not the kind of person to do that as a joke or prank.

The second reason was that Princess Freya had brusquely declined all the marriage talks that her father or brother had brought up so far.

As one might have already expected from the fact that she chose to become the captain of the "Yellow Leaves" and travel to another continent by her own accord, Princess Freya had a rather wild side to her for a female member of the royal family.

Aware of her role as royalty more than anyone, she did watch out for her conduct in public and was even ready to accept a political marriage in the end, but right now, she treasured her freedom above all.

Hence Skathi could not believe her eyes, when Princess Freya practically threw away that precious time by herself with the recent decision.

Stroking her short silver-bluish hair for a bit, Princess Freya responded to the question from her trusted retainer.

"Right. It would be best to tell you, if no one else.

This is just my personal opinion, but I believe that the sea will play an even bigger role for the North Continent from now on. I even dare to say that the safeguarding of the sea will be the most important matter for our Uppsala

Kingdom."

"Yes, I agree with you."

Skathi nodded assenting to the words of Princess Freya, letting her blonde ponytail flutter in the process.

The northern region of the North Continent, where the Uppsala Kingdom was located, was separated from the rest of the continent by a steep mountain range. From the halfway point on, that mountain range was covered in snow all year long. Due to that, it was close to impossible that the Uppsala Kingdom would face a large-scale invasion by land.

At the same time, it also meant that the Uppsala Kingdom could barely do any trading with the other countries by land.

The northern region technically had three more countries besides the Uppsala Kingdom, but all three of them had the same cultural scene as the Uppsala Kingdom in a broader sense, so trade with them was not really all that worthwhile.

From the point of view of the countries in the central or south region, a war in the northern region would be nothing more than a "civil strife".

Long story short, the Uppsala Kingdom had to go out on the sea, when they wanted to trade with countries of a different cultural scene, and an invader from a different cultural scene would have to come mainly from the sea to attack the Uppsala Kingdom.

"Considering that, we do require ships for keeping our country at peace as well as for expanding the sea trade. But our own woodlands are dwindling."

That was the downside of being a developed country in various aspects to date.

The Uppsala Kingdom produced steel faster than any other country, built ships more vigorous than any other country and burnt more charcoal than any other country.

As a result, their own wood resources had drawn to an end before anyone else's. Well, to be precise, the end was only becoming foreseeable now and

their land was not stripped bared yet, but the large trees required for the ship manufacture could only be found in the borderland mountain area now.

"It certainly is a grave problem for the future of our country, when we exhaust these large trees for ship building. But can we not compensate for it with money? I was under the impression that we were going to establish a stable intercontinental trade, so that we can buy the wood from the other countries on the North Continent with its profits."

The silver-haired princess showed a confident smile and answered her trusted retainer, who had offered her own opinion.

"That certainly is a safe way, but if possible, I would like to take it one step further. Assuming that establishing a permanent intercontinental trade is beyond question for our country, there is something bothering me."

"Bothering you?"

Skathi cocked her head puzzled, whereupon Freya continued her explanation.

"Yes. It concerns the homeland of Prince Francesco and Princess Bona, whom we met at the banquet earlier: The Twin Kingdom of Sharro and Jilbell.

They said that the two royal families ruling that country, the Sharro Royal Family and Jilbell Royal Family, were settlers from the North Continent."

"Yes, Prince Francesco definitely said that. Judging by their looks, it does not seem to be a lie, though."

Skathi remembered the appearances of Prince Francesco and Princess Bona from their meeting at the night banquet and answered like that.

Blonde hair, blue eyes and white skin for Prince Francesco. Auburn hair, purple eyes and also white skin for Princess Bona. They definitely only looked like someone from the North Continent. When Princess Freya had broached the subject again, apparently half of the nobility in the Twin Kingdom were supposed to look like a person from the North Continent and their claim that their ancestors were settlers from the North Continent did sound cogent to her.

Princess Freya affirmed Skathi's opinion and added her own assumption.

"Certainly. I believe it to be true as well. But then the question arises: At what

time did their ancestors move to the South Continent?

Skathi, have you ever heard any rumours about two royal families with a bloodline magic each moving from the North Continent to the South Continent?"

"Well, now that you mention it... I can't say I have."

After a bit of pondering, the blonde female warrior shook her head.

Needless to say, Skathi was just a mere soldier and not an historian of the North Continent. To begin with, the North Continent was vast. There was not a single person, who ascertained the rise and fall of every royal family, since this world lacked the techniques to transmit information as well as the writing of history.

Having said this, it did not happen every day that two royal families with a bloodline magic emigrated to the South Continent together. It was a bit strange that not even a word of it had gotten around.

Her trusted retainer cocked her head puzzled, whereupon the silver-haired princess nodded once

"I have not heard anything, either. We would have to consult the academy in the Capital to be sure, but I assume that their ancestors moved to the South Continent quite a long time ago."

and put her own assumption into words.

"I see."

Skathi could agree with the assertion from Princess Freya. As time passed, oral lore got distorted. Then it started to fade away and in the end, it was forgotten.

"In that case, the 'Church' will pose a problem. How much do you know about the 'White Empire', Skathi?"

The female warrior was slightly perplexed, since the question was all too sudden and unexpected to her, but she answered truthfully anyway.

"You mean the 'White Empire' from the fairytale? It was a vast empire that in ancient times. If I remember correctly, it started a war against the ancient

dragons and was obliterated within seven days?”

Everyone from the North Continent had heard of this fairytale at least once in his life. It was a legend with so less credibility that the historians of the Uppsala Kingdom dismissed it as a “ridiculous fabricated story without any substance”.

But unfortunately, some people happened to believe this stupid fairytale while others pretended to believe in it in order to profit from it.

“Yes, that is the one. I am not all that familiar with the teachings of the ‘Church’, but the ‘Church’ worships the ancient dragons, so there is no doubt that they have an extremely hostile view towards the ‘White Empire’, seeing as it once started a war against these ancient dragons.”

It might seem laughable to regard a questionable existence as an enemy, but religion mainly drew its power from such fairytales, so they could not treat it with scorn.

“But I think even the ‘Church’ teaches that the ‘White Empire’ was destroyed well and truly?”

More precisely, it was said that the whole ruling class of the ‘White Empire’, namely its nobility and ‘twelve royal families’, had perished.

All the other surviving citizens had admittedly been guilty of having basked in the prosperity of the ‘White Empire’, but that sin was not worth the death sentence, so the merciful ancient dragons had spared their lives and deported them to the South Continent. At least that was what the ‘Church’ was teaching. It was also the reason why the South Continent was looked down upon as the ‘Land of Sinners’.

The interjection from Skathi prompted Princess Freya to frown for a bit before she shook her head and replied.

“Not quite. As you may know, the Church is not monolithic. They have dissenting opinions about the teaching and one of them claims that the descendants of the twelve royal families fled all the way to the South Continent and are plotting their revenge against the ancient dragons to this day.”

“Milady, are you implying that the Sharow Royal Family and Jilbell Royal Family are descendants of the ‘White Empire’?”

Princess Freya gave her startled retainer a wry smile.

"Not at all. I would never suggest something that ridiculous. The 'White Empire' is just a fairytale to begin with."

But I am afraid the 'Church' might use it as a pretence to interfere with the intercontinental trade of our country."

"Oh... That is what you meant."

With the same stern face as her master, Skathi expressed her understanding to her.

The 'Church' had an authority on the North Continent right now that was not to be sneezed at. Especially in the southern region, practically every country was under the influence of the 'Church', so spoiling things with them meant spoiling the intercontinental trade itself.

After all, the Uppsala Kingdom was located in the northern region of the North Continent. In order to cross over to the South Continent, they had to stop by a harbour in the southern region of the North Continent for supplies at least once.

For that reason, the 'Church' was a damned opponent for the Uppsala Kingdom, since it was effectively their alleged enemy, but at the same time, they had to stay in favour with them to some extent.

"But we are trading with the Carpa Kingdom and not the Twin Kingdom. Could we not keep the consequences within a limit as long as we did not get any closer to the Twin Kingdom?"

"That certainly is possible, but it would be such a waste. I mean, they have the 'Bestowal Magic' and 'Healing Magic'. The North Continent does not have such powerful bloodline magic."

"That's for sure."

When her master heaved a dejected sigh, the blonde female soldier could not help but agree with her.

They had not heard any details yet, but the 'Bestowal Magic' was apparently a unique magic to make tools called 'Magic Tools' that allowed anyone to use

magic.

These were practically indispensable for life-endangering voyages such as the intercontinental trade.

A “Drinking Water Treatment” magic tool for example would let them have enough drinking water at sea, even if Princess Freya were to be in bad health.

Not to mention the “Water Manipulation” magic. Leakages were bound to happen on long sea journeys and normally the crew had no choice but to scoop out the water with buckets, but if someone could use the “Water Manipulation” magic, they would be able to move a large amount of water all at once during an emergency.

Distresses would surely become less precarious, when these tasks relied on magic tools instead of humans.

And a “Wind Manipulation” magic tool would be the crème de la crème. The crew of the “Yellow Leaves” was talented without doubt, but sometimes a sudden change of weather could occur along the unfamiliar route, literally taking the wind out of the sails. A lot of incidents could be avoided, if the wind could be manipulated at will at such times.

There was also the rumoured “Imbued Stone of Healing”. It would surely be an immeasurable trump card for emergencies, if they could get their hands on one.

“Hence you want to get involved with the Twin Kingdom as well. I can understand that. But how does that relate to you getting married, Milady?”

They got back onto the initial topic by a devious route.

Princess Freya smiled happily to her trusted retainer, who had not lost sign of the essential point during their long conversation.

“It allows me to resolve everything in one fell swoop.

The woodlands in our home country are steadily declining, but the replenishment for navy and trade ships is not slowing down at all. As things stand at the moment, we have no choice but to rely on the southern countries under the influence of the ‘Church’, if we want to continue the intercontinental

trade.

So why not establish a shipyard in the Carpa Kingdom, call over the shipwrights from the Uppsala Kingdom and build the ships here?

This would allow us to even build the ‘Mammoth Ships’ for which we currently do not have enough resources and are thus stuck at the drawing board. The Mammoth Ship is even larger than our ‘Yellow Leaves’ and when we provide it with the magic tools we will buy from the Twin Kingdom, it is no longer a dream to travel between the Uppsala Kingdom and Carpa Kingdom without an intermediate stop for supplies. And then we no longer have to curry favour with the southern countries or the ‘Church’.

See, it all works out.”

Her master outlined her bold plan with a bright smile, whereupon the female warrior was at a loss for words, overwhelmed for a moment.

“Indeed... If all goes well, it does work out, but will it really play out like that?”

Her plan was by no means wishful thinking, but it would still require a few fortunate turns of events to accomplish it like that.

“Well, that was just the best-case scenario. I do not mind if it takes a decade or two until we can trade without an intermediate stop, but I concluded that having a shipyard in the Carpa Kingdom is essential in the end.”

“And for that purpose, you are willing to lower yourself as a ‘concubine’?”

Skathi emphasized the “concubine” part as she inquired with a stern expression.

Princess Freya was the first princess of the Uppsala Kingdom, born to the current king and its legal wife. She was a woman with the best pedigree within the country.

To be honest, it was quite disreputable if she were to become a concubine for a different country. All the worse, she would not be the concubine to the ruler, but to the Prince Consort.

Generally speaking, that marriage would imply that the Uppsala Kingdom was one or two ranks below the Carpa Kingdom.

Nevertheless, Princess Freya did not waver in her determination in light of that inquiry.

"Yes, precisely. I believe this is to be the turning point for the future of our Uppsala Kingdom. We might cause our ruin, if we hesitate now."

The female warrior gave her strong-willed master a look of grievance.

"You may be right, but sacrificing yourself for it is just too..."

"Eh? Sacrificing? Why would I?"

"Huh?"

Seeing how Princess Freya widened her eyes in surprise, Skathi realized that she and her master had some kind of misunderstanding here.

"You loathed the idea of becoming someone's wife and living like a bird in a cage, right? So you kept refusing all the marriage talks back home, right?"

"Yes, of course, but that does not mean that I was expecting to never get married in my life. I do intend to combine my free life of adventures with my life of royal obligations."

"Right. Which means you are quitting your free-spirited life with this marriage now and prioritise your royal obligation, correct? Even though you could have prolonged your marriage for a few more years at your age."

At this point, Princess Freya finally realized what exactly her trusted retainer was misunderstanding.

The silver-haired princess burst out in laughter and shared her thoughts with her retainer.

"You got it wrong, Skathi. In fact, I want to marry His Majesty Zenjirou in order to maintain my free life."

The one month in Valentia and the banquet tonight convinced me that he is the ideal husband for me. Or at least, he is better than the gentlemen my father and brother introduced to me so far."

"He is?"

Skathi cocked her head puzzled in light of the unexpected evaluation.

Even though she saw Zenjirou in a different light after the ruckus with the Pack Dragons, she still did not regard him all that highly. Skathi was a warrior to the core, so from her point of view, a man like Zenjirou, who had never carried a weapon, was not worth her attention.

But that did not seem to be the case for Princess Freya.

"Yes. For one thing, he showed me respect for crossing the sea as a female captain, for another thing, he always treated me as his equal during the negotiations.

And at the earlier banquet, he also had a good mood at eye level going with his wife Her Majesty Aura.

I am sure that he will genuinely accept it, when the woman he marries acts like a man, and not just for show."

The assumption from Skathi had been right in a sense. Princess Freya had originally intended to live at her leisure as long as possible without getting married, before resigning herself to her fate of becoming a "good wife" to someone for the sake of the royal family.

But she raised her hopes, when she saw Zenjirou and Aura. In this world, there was female royalty, who lived freely, even after getting married, and male royalty, who not only allowed it, but also supported her.

Moreover, that very male royalty only had one wife so far and it would even benefit her mother country, if she were to become his concubine.

As soon as Princess Freya had cottoned on to that fact, she had taken action almost by reflex.

Her motivation was a bit too self-centred and pragmatic to actually call it "love", but precisely because of that, she was devoted to it and grudged no pains to accomplish it.

"You see, His Majesty Zenjirou is the perfect partner for me. A symbiosis of my ideal and reality."

"I, I see."

Her attitude towards marriage was extremely pragmatic, but she had

proposed due to her own desire this time. As the female warrior came to know of this, she just nodded consenting numerous times as though she was overwhelmed by all of this.

*

From the next day on, the whole Royal Palace was talking about the proposal from Princess Freya to Zenjirou.

Needless to say, no one knew about the fact that the gesture Princess Freya had taken was the official proposal gesture for women of the Uppsala Kingdom, but asking to be your partner for a marriage ceremony was pretty much a confession already.

The marriage between the national hero, who was still single in his thirties, and the fortunate woman, who managed to snatch him, even though she was five years past her prime, was already an hot topic, but as expected, it was no match for the fact that a foreign princess had practically confessed to the Prince Consort in public.

And overshadowed by this ruckus, it totally went unnoticed that the other former marriage candidate of Queen Aura, Raffaelo Marquis, was going to take the Inner Palace Waiting Maid Keyshia Massana to the ceremony as his partner.

“Have you heard what happened at the banquet last night?”

“Yes, of course. The Northern Princess sure is daring.”

“Unfortunately I was not present there, but did she really say it right out in the open? Not just hinted at it?”

“Yes. I happened to look their way at that moment. Princess Freya directly told Master Zenjirou: ‘Please take me as your partner for the coming marriage ceremony.’”

“Phew, how shameless.”

“The North Continent really does things differently.”

“Oh my? Maybe Princess Freya is to be blamed and not the North Continent?”

“Sh! They can hear you!”

Whispered gossip was going around everywhere in the Royal Palace.

The matter was actually too political to call it simple gossip, but the behaviour of Princess Freya was such a sensation that the amusing gossip put any serious political discussion in the shade.

“Anyway, it is far from over.”

And although they put on a serious look in the end, they still could not completely hide the amused curiosity in their eyes.

On a certain afternoon after a few days with these rumours going around.

The persons in question, Princess Freya and Zenjirou were meeting in one room of the Royal Palace.

They met because of the delivery for the previously promised goats, but under the current circumstances, it would be scandalous, if they were to do this one-on-one.

As a result, they had to choose a day, where Queen Aura was available, so it had been delayed until today.

The refreshing breeze and gentle sunlight found their way inside the room through the opened windows, where Zenjirou and Queen Aura sat next to each other on the same couch, whereas Princess Freya sat across from them.

Behind her stood a man and a woman. The woman was the well-known tall female warrior: Skathi. But the man was a new face. He seemed to be from the North Continent as well, judging by his skin and hair colour, but compared the other soldiers from the ‘Yellow Leaves’, he looked small and frail.

Nevertheless, he was still taller and more muscular than Zenjirou.

“It took longer than expected, but I present you the previously promised goats. You get three male and eight females for a total of eleven goats. All of them are young and healthy, so you should be able to breed them at once. They are giving plenty of milk as well.

They will surely meet your expectations, Your Majesty Zenjirou.”

Princess Freya immediately talked business and explained this with a brisk tone. The goats itself had already been taken to the Royal Palace, when Princess

Freya had entered the Capital, but this paperwork officially transferred the possession of the goats from Princess Freya to Zenjirou.

"Thank you, Princess Freya. It is the best gift I could wish for. You have my deep gratitude."

Zenjirou answered like this with a bright smile. His gratitude was no flattery, because the food would become a lot more enjoyable once they obtained the dairy goods made from the milk of the goats.

He was not dissatisfied with the cooking of the Inner Palace per se, but it certainly got him excited, when it was possible to reproduce the dishes or snacks of his homeland here.

Sitting next to him, Queen Aura entered the conversation after his words.

"Allow me to express my gratitude to you as well, Princess Freya. We have prepared a grazing ground and stable for the goats in the courtyard of the Inner Palace, but as you may know, no one in our country has ever taken care of goats before."

I am pretty sure we committed some mistakes in our preparations, so I would like to borrow your expertise on it."

"Certainly. I brought him along for this very reason. Nicolai, introduce yourself."

The young man standing behind the couch gave a jerk in light of the words from Princess Freya.

"Y-Yes. My name is N-Nicolai! Please ask me anything about the goats!"

The voice of the young man Nicolai had become completely tremulous from nervousness. Princess Freya back him up in a calm manner.

"Nicolai is mainly in charge of the livestock on the 'Yellow Leaves'. He comes from a peasant family with a large farm."

No one knows more about goats than him. I am willing to assign him to you for the time being."

Upon her introduction, Zenjirou nodded convinced.

Apparently the reason his physique looked weaker than the warriors from the “Yellow Leaves” was that he was no professional soldier. As a matter of fact, only a quarter of the whole crew was solely specialised in combat, since the “Yellow Leaves” was a large ship for extended voyages.

It goes without saying that all of them could take up arms if the situation called for it, considering that they had been chosen for the ship that carried the first princess, but they were not explicitly trained in martial arts.

“I see. I am sure it will be a lot of work, but I am counting on you.”

“Yes, I will do my utmost!”

Still standing at attention, Nicolai responded to the acknowledgement from Zenjirou with a ringing voice.

Although he was part of the crew of the “Yellow Leaves”, Nicolai was young and nothing but a farmer, so he probably was not really high-born.

Zenjirou was worried about the young goat enthusiast, who had turned bright red from nervousness, so he immediately produced relief.

“Princess Freya, I do not mean to rush things, but if possible, I want him to head into the courtyard right now and start teaching our staff how to take care of the goats straightaway.”

His wife seemed to understand his intention as she went along with it.

“Yes, that sounds good. Mr. Nicolai, five of our people should already be taking care of the goats in the courtyard. You may regard them as your subordinates. Order and use them as you see fit.

But please keep in mind that your instructions should enable them to take care of the goats by themselves in the future.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Nicolai lowered his head almost to an angle of ninety degrees on the spot.

Taking care of goats may sound easy at first, but it required a lot of knowledge: How to put them to sleep. How to prepare their food. How to breed them safely. How they gave birth. How to treat the young goats. How to milk them or even how to slaughter them. One month would hardly be enough to

learn all of this.

"Indeed. You heard it, Nicolai. Please head to the courtyard and do your thing. And conduct yourself properly."

"Yes, you can count on me, Princess Freya."

With the permission from his master, Nicolai bowed clumsily and quickly left the room.

"Allow me to thank you two for your consideration on behalf of my subordinate."

Giving the leaving Nicolai a fleeting glance, Princess Freya then said this with a soft smile. She apparently had caught on to the intention from Zenjirou.

Zenjirou became somewhat bashful and hid his embarrassment behind a forced smile.

"Do not mention it. I did mean it, when I said that I wanted him to start right away, after all."

"Yes, please be at ease. Nicolai is truly an expert, when it comes to goats.

The goats we picked for you are splendid, too, so it should definitely answer your expectations.

Nicolai mentioned that they fulfil the 'three m-conditions'."

"M-conditions?"

"Yes. Milk, meat and sexually matur..."

"Milady!"

In the midst of the answer from Princess Freya, the female warrior rebuked her from behind and stopped her borderline utterance at the very last second.

As far as the official records were concerned, this meeting was held in order to pass on the goats. Hence it would be no problem to call it a day now, but this occasion was far too valuable for both parties to let it end with just the transfer of the goats.

Zenjirou had been relatively active so far, because the present was for him, but now the Queen sitting next to him would take up the baton.

"Well then, we finished what we came here for, but a lot faster than I had expected. Princess Freya, if your schedule allows it, would you like to make some small talk for a bit longer?"

Despite the choice of inquiring words, her eyes and voice were clearly communicated her intention to talk about that certain matter.

There was no way Princess Freya would miss that hint.

"Yes, of course. I am not so foolish to let an opportunity to talk with you slide so easily."

She replied with a perfectly controlled smile as well.

(Oh shit, this is too much for me...)

Zenjirou foresaw the following conversation and starting to think up an excuse to leave, but changed his mind soon after.

(No, I'll definitely regret, if I leave now.)

There was hardly anything he could do, though, even if he stayed. He had admittedly gotten somewhat used to the heated exchanges of higher society, but it was totally out of his league, when it concerned establishing a partnership between a man and a woman.

Nevertheless, Zenjirou did understand that the problem revolved around his person, so he resigned to his fate, telling himself that he ought to be present at least.

Whether she knew about this determination of her husband or not, the Queen boldly threw out her chest and started to make "small talk".

"You sure surprised us at the earlier night banquet. The Royal Palace speaks about nothing but you, Princess Freya."

The silver-haired Princess flushed her cheeks a bit embarrassed, when the red-haired Queen suddenly went like a bull at a gate.

"I am aware of the trouble I caused you, but I thought that I would never get the chance to get closer to His Majesty Zenjirou, if I let this opportunity slide, so I was unable to keep myself in check."

"Oho, my husband sure is loved.

He certainly is an irreplaceable Prince Consort to me as well as the target of my ardent love, but if I may say so, he is not really all that popular in general. May I ask what attracted you to him so much?"

As troublesome as it sounded, even the political marriages between nobility or royalty that were in fact consummated for status and wealth, placed quite the importance on the feelings of the couple to the outside world.

This being the case, someone could not really say "I'm only after your status and money. I have not the slightest interest in you as a person.", when asked this question after confession their love.

Confronted with a curious look from Queen Aura that looked forward how she would answer, Princess Freya took a short deep breath and replied.

"His personality, of course. Correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that you should be able to relate to that the most, Your Majesty Aura."

"Oho, his personality, eh."

"Yes. It might be strange for me to say this, but I am not what you would call a typical female royalty. I am sure you realized that, seeing as I came all the way here."

"Hmm..."

Aura neither approved, nor opposed the explanation from Princess Freya.

It would cause nothing but trouble if she were to approve of an utterance mocking royalty, even if the person in question did say it herself. On the other hand, it was difficult to oppose the statement, too, since the truth of it was obvious to anyone.

Princess Freya continued with her explanation.

"Even at home, I often took drastic actions. Rather than staying quietly in the safety of the Royal Palace, I want to do what I can to help my country. My Father and Brother had to put up with a lot, since I could not repress that sentiment. I gave my opinion to all kind of things that women were normally not supposed to get involved with, and sometimes even achieved results.

Most of the men reacted almost same at these times: They either frowned and called me an insolent woman or put on a fake smile and expressed regret over wasting such talent on a woman.

My actions did cross the red line, so I am aware that I am at fault for going against the system, of course.

However I cannot help but feel devastated, when I am proud to have achieved something, but no one praises me for it honestly.”

“Hmm, I see.”

Aura could really relate to her assertion on an emotional level. Apart from the time, since she ascended the throne, Aura, too, had experienced a lot of inconveniences while she had still acted as a princess during the Great War.

Hence she also could pretty much guess what Princess Freya was going to say now.

“But His Majesty Zenjirou is different.

When I met him as the Captain of the ‘Yellow Leaves’, he simply commended me for accomplishing the intercontinental sea travel.

Moreover, he allowed me to be an equal negotiation partner in the negotiations to pave the way for the intercontinental trade agreement this time around. No, it was not a matter of allowing it or not. He just took it for granted that I was a negotiation partner at eye level.

I do not know any other men that would act like him.”

Aura hit the mark for the most part with her prediction of Princess Freya’s next utterance.

“Why, yes. I can definitely relate to that the best. The notion of my husband to treat women as equals is extremely pleasant for a woman, who does not like to take a backseat.”

“I would appreciate it, if I could take part in that pleasantness as well.”

“Hmm, I am not so sure about that. You see, I am quite the jealous woman. Can I actually be so generous to allow my beloved husband to give another woman but me amorous glances? I am not giving me much credit here.”

"Oh, Your Majesty, please show me the mercy befitting of a ruler. I promise that I will not get in your way. There would be no greater happiness in life for me, if you were allow me to take part of it even for a little bit."

Right next to the fiercely debating Queen and Princess, Zenjirou innerly writhed with embarrassment while every fibre of his body, including his facial muscles, were frozen stiff.

(O-Oh god, stop it. Any more of this and the shame will kill me...)

The torrent of flourish words from the beautiful woman and beautiful girl praising him had no prospect of an end. From a rational point of view, he did understand that they were merely "putting on a show for the marriage negotiation", of course.

But even if he did understand this in his head, it did not necessarily mean that his feelings would align themselves accordingly.

Zenjirou was confronted with numerous praises exaggerated to the point that he did not even know if they applied to him as well as a passionate confession of love. His spirit was not strong enough to withstand such a combined attack.

He did not doubt that his wife Aura was really loving him that much, of course, but her choice of words was extremely over the top. As for Princess Freya, he was not even sure whether she was actually talking about love or not.

Who would have thought that rhetoric could be such a powerful weapon? Zenjirou clenched his teeth and weathered out the urge to squirm in pain from scratching his itching body all over.

In reality, Aura was speaking her mind more than Zenjirou was acknowledging and Princess Freya was by no means telling lies, even though she did use overly complicated expressions. Needless to say, Zenjirou had no way of knowing this.

Likewise, Aura and Princess Freya were not aware that he was fighting with his embarrassment on the inside, so their exchanged continued like a torture for him.

"Still, the feelings of both parties are important in this. I feel bad about saying this myself, but my husband completely loves me from the bottom of his heart."

"I am most envious."

"But that raises the question if there will be any place for you. You are very beautiful, of course. So much more than a middle-aged woman like myself. Nine out of ten men would surely choose you over me without hesitation. But I am afraid that my husband is that tenth man."

"...."

When the Queen said this puffed up with pride, Princess Freya was stuck for an immediate answer and fell silent for the first time today.

Speaking of, Queen Aura and Princess Freya were different people altogether to the point that their only common trait was their gender.

Aura had long red hair, whereas Princess Freya had short silver-blue hair.

The brown skin of Aura stood in contrast to the pure-white skin of Princess Freya.

Furthermore, Aura was approaching her thirties, but Princess Freya was still in her teens.

Last but not least, Aura had an extraordinary height and shoulder width for a woman coupled with a large bust and bottom while Princess Freya had a rather slight build for a svensk that came along with sloping shoulders and a general petiteness.

When Aura was the ideal type of woman for Zenjirou, then Princess Freya was definitely nowhere near his sphere of interest.

However, Princess Freya was not so gracious to back off because of that.

She pulled herself together at once, put on a bright smile and made a suggestion.

"On a related note, the female warrior standing behind me is Victoria Kronkvist also known as Skathi. She is my trusted retainer and bodyguard to whom I completely trust my life. I would like to get your permission to let her accompany me in the case I am allowed to move into the Inner Palace."

Believe it or not, Princess Freya just threw in her trusted retainer as an extra.

Admittedly, Skathi was more or less similar to Aura: A tall virago with the right curves around her bust and bottom. But she was even taller than Aura, who was already tall for a woman, by more than ten centimetre, so it was a debatable point whether she was the “same type of woman”.

“PFT...!?”

Zenjirou unwillingly snorted with surprise in light of the unexpected offer, but fortunately for him, someone else displayed an even greater reaction, which overshadowed his own.

“M-Milady, what are you saying!?”

It was no one else but the aforementioned female warrior herself: Skathi.

Seeing as she turned red and was flustered beyond help, it was obvious that the princess did not arrange with her about it beforehand.

Princess Freya must have mentioned it after thinking of it on the spot.

Realizing that, Zenjirou was overcome with partly repulsion, partly misgiving, so he inadvertently put in his two cents.

“Princess Freya, I am aware that you are not being serious in your suggestion, but do you not think that you went a bit too far here?

Miss Skathi is an excellent warrior. Some of her talent may be inherent, but I am sure she exercised quite the effort to reach that level.

You should know better than anyone else how wrongfully it would be to make her give up the path of the warrior and force her to live the life of a woman instead, Princess Freya.”

Zenjirou had dared to go for a slap in the face, since he wanted to stop the escalating eulogy, but his intentions went completely unnoticed.

“Ah...”

Aura showed him an expression for a moment that seemed to say “You idiot”, but it was too late anyway.

Princess Freya smiled broadly in response to his scolding

“You are right. I do apologize for speaking out of turn. But your objection only

confirmed my belief again that you are the ideal partner for me, Your Majesty Zenjirou.”

and made sheep's eyes at him.

“Oh...”

It made perfect sense.

Princess Freya had claimed that Zenjirou was the ideal partner for her, precisely because he treated “women as equals”.

By scolding her for the earlier statement and appreciating the free will of Skathi, he was obviously agreeing to her moral values.

“I see. You do seem to have an eye for men, Princess Freya.”

Queen Aura smiled wryly while her face started to show a hint of resignation.

“Well, I do understand what attracted you to my husband for now, but feelings alone will not accomplish a marriage for people of position like us. You should know that, Princess Freya.”

Queen Aura said this and advanced the discussion to the next stage.

A marriage between royalty/nobility was not meant to substantiate love, but to bring profit to both parties.

The real negotiation would start from here on.

Both the Queen and Princess knew this, so they put on a serious look alike.

“Of course. I do believe that the future of our two countries will be extremely bright, when I do marry into your family.”

“Oho, can you elaborate? I am afraid that our country is quite out of touch with international marriages.”

The utterance from Aura was no lie. On the South Continent, royalty equalled bloodline magic, so royal marriages were generally carried out within the country. The disadvantage of leaking the bloodline magic to another country outweighed the advantage of allying with a foreign country by far.

In other words, Aura was basically saying that their own culture was usually

not allowing international marriages between royalty and that Princess Freya ought to present an adequate benefit, if she wanted to push the marriage through.

And her implicated meaning seemed to have come across.

Princess Freya corrected her sitting posture on the couch, took a deep breath and began her persuasion with a focussed look in her ice-blue eyes.

"Yes. First of all, my country is quite advanced in technology, even for the standards of the North Continent. We may not have a large territory, nor the population befitting a major power, because we lack the farmland, but we pride ourselves upon our unrivalled technology.

Incidentally, I am the crown princess. A marriage with me would not only involve my person."

"What do you have to offer?"

The Queen asked bluntly, whereupon the Princess answered kindly.

"Our civilization and the manpower to provide it.

I was born and raised in a different culture on the North Continent. Of course I will do my utmost to adapt to your culture, when you accept my proposal.

But to be realistic, it would be quite difficult for me to live here, if I had to rely on your culture alone.

Hence I want to bring enough manpower along to reproduce the culture of the Uppsala Kingdom here to a certain extent."

"Hmm, your culture. What does that entail in detail?"

"Why, yes. I will not bore you with all the fine details, but it would mainly be 'iron' and 'ships'. The Uppsala Kingdom worked its way up with the power of iron and cemented its leading position with seafaring. Without these two, the Uppsala Kingdom would not exist today."

"I see."

Queen Aura narrowed her eyes to slits as though her interest was piqued.

Strictly speaking, Princess Freya had just told a lie.

Iron and ships were in fact the support pillars of the Uppsala Kingdom, but that fact was completely irrelevant to her so-called aim to “reproduce her own culture in the country, where she married into”.

Only a hardcore female sailor would need the ironwork and ships of her home country that bad in the country she moved to for marriage.

Well, you could not rule out the possibility that it actually held true for Princess Freya, but a female member of royalty normally brought along bits of her own culture that were closely related to her lifestyle, namely food and clothes, for her marriage.

It made sense to bring along cooks, tailors, specialized farmers or animal breeders, but there would technically be no need for blacksmiths or shipwrights.

Yet Princess Freya had brought “iron” and “ships” to the table first. She had done that, because she had come to know in the negotiations in Valentia that the Carpa Kingdom was desiring these two the most.

Princess Freya had to give a good account of herself here, so she demonstrated that she could provide what they were after.

Queen Aura did not bat an eyelash in light of her offer, but she could not help but be surprised at heart, seeing as Princess Freya seemed to be more serious about this than she had anticipated.

“Your ironwork and ships are famous, even on the North Continent. That certainly sounds attractive. However, is the Uppsala Kingdom really that magnanimous to offer such technology for free as the dowry for their important princess?”

She asked that, knowing that this was not the case, of course.

Princess Freya had brought her title as the crown princess, the iron and the ships on the table. So what was she going to ask for in exchange?

Taking a deep breath, the princess nodded briefly and sat upright.

“Well, I do not like to bring it up, but I AM the legitimate crown princess of the Uppsala Kingdom. If I were to become a concubine of His Majesty Zenjirou

under normal circumstances, it would appear as though the Uppsala Kingdom is socially subordinate to the Carpa Kingdom.

And that would make it problematic to have a ‘relationship on equal terms’ from now on.”

“Yes, if you actually want to have a ‘relationship on equal terms’, that is.”

The Carpa Kingdom had not really a reason to tie a relationship on equal terms. They would never lower themselves, of course, and would actually welcome it, when the other party lowered themselves on their own accord.

The silver-haired princess continued without answering the suggestive remark of the Queen.

“So I was hoping you could bestow a special rank on me in order to preserve my position.”

“A special rank?”

“Yes. An aristocratic title for members of the royal family along with a principality that has a seaport.”

“Oho. So you are demanding land?”

Queen Aura asserted pressure at once, but Princess Freya was not intimidated as she went on.

“We would establish a shipyard there first of all. I want to build ships there that will benefit both of our countries.”

“Are you going to call over the shipwrights from the Uppsala Kingdom?”

“Yes. The key members would come from over there. But it is hardly likely that these will be enough, so I think that we will have to borrow some craftsmen from you.”

“I see.”

Aura pondered over her suggestion for a bit.

The fact that she wanted to employ craftsmen of the Carpa Kingdom in the shipyard meant that she had no intention to keep their ship designs a secret. In the beginning, the Carpa Kingdom would have to rely on the instructions of the

shipwrights from the Uppsala Kingdom, but over time, they would be able to learn the technology to build large sailing ships on their own.

Just in case, Queen Aura checked with her.

"Ships are mainly built from wood, but a part of them also requires iron, correct? Are you going to build all these parts here as well?"

"Yes. I intend to call for some blacksmiths from our country, too, but just like with the shipwrights, they will hardly be sufficient, when going into a full-fledged production, so I would like to borrow the help of your blacksmiths as well."

In other words, she was saying that she did not mind to actively teach them their ironwork technology as well as their shipbuilding technology.

"Hmm."

Aura mused for a moment.

From her standpoint, she really wanted to get her hands on the large sailing ship technology as well as the exquisite ironwork technology. Especially the ironwork technology, since it included the blueprints for their high-performance furnace. The research for the glass manufacture should make a great leap forward with that furnace.

Aura was willing to make quite the concessions, if it meant its obtainment.

She cast a quick glance at her husband sitting next to her.

He was silently submitting to all this with bated breath, so she felt kind of sorry for him, but she would fail as a ruler of a country, if she were to let such an attractive opportunity slide.

"What kind of title do you have in mind?"

"One that is on par with the typical feudal lord title of your country, I guess. It would be ancillary to the royal family, but the principality gets autonomy in exchange for yearly taxes."

"An aristocratic title for a branch member of the royal family and the title for an autonomous feudal lord are quite different, you know. The biggest difference being the right to appoint a successor."

A feudal lord has the right to appoint the successor all by himself, but the reigning monarch keeps the right to pass on the aristocratic title for a member of the royal family.

On the other hand, a feudal lord generally has no claim to the throne, even if it is a royal princess, whereas the branch family of the royal family does have that claim, but is lower in status.”

“In that case, you may keep the right to appoint a successor, Your Majesty. But I would like to stipulate that someone inheriting the blood of the Uppsala Royal Family and Carpa Royal Family will be giving priority to the succession.

Needless to say, I have no use for a claim to the throne of the Carpa Kingdom, either.”

“The same would apply to the throne of your country.”

“Yes, I am aware.”

Their fierce battle continued in form of words.

Princess Freya had ventured to explicitly state her “abdication of the claim to the throne of the Carpa Kingdom” instead of lumping together the claims to the throne of both countries.

If not for Aura’s intervention, the child or grandchild of Princess Freya and Zenjirou would have been able to assert its claim to the throne of the Uppsala Kingdom.

And then the Uppsala Kingdom could call them over under the pretext of their succession to the throne, in order to steal the disposition of the bloodline “Space-Time Magic” of the Carpa Royal Family in the future.

Moreover, Zenjirou did not only have the disposition for the “Space-Time Magic”, but also for the “Bestowal Magic” from the Sharrow Royal Family. Princess Freya had no way to know about this, though.

Queen Aura contrived a counteroffensive that would not reveal these circumstances.

“You were born and raised into a royal family without a bloodline magic, so it might be difficult for you to understand it, but here on the South Continent, the

practitioners of a bloodline play an important role as their numbers represent the power of the state.

Unfortunately, our country currently only has three practitioners of our bloodline magic: Myself, Zenjirou and our child in arms Carlos. Due to that, our nobility is really pushing my husband to ‘take a concubine’.

Hence that very concubine must be able to aid the effort to increase the practitioners of the bloodline magic in the royal family. If not, we might as well forget all about this. I hope you can understand that.”

It was said in a somewhat roundabout way, but Princess Freya realized what Aura wanted to say after a bit of pondering, so she suggested this with a somewhat stiff expression.

“...You can check someone for the disposition of the bloodline magic, right? So when there are various candidates for the succession, you prioritize the one without the disposition for the succession of the title, whereas those with the disposition will be adopted into the royal family. But if the candidate without the disposition passes away for some reason, you will return the other candidate with the disposition. How does that sound?”

“Hmm, that seems appropriate. Although one may not show the ‘disposition for the bloodline magic’, the latent ability is still inherited, so the marriage of the chosen successor would still need the approval of the royal family, but this is a law that applies to all high-ranking nobles in our country. Please reconcile yourself to it.”

“...Very well.”

“Then we need to clarify the military for your principality. For a branch member of the royal family, we could deploy the royal army there.”

“If possible, I would like to keep my own military. Defending the land is one thing, but they need to keep the harbour safe, too, or it would be putting the cart before the horse.”

“Oho? Then you plan to do your own intercontinental trading with your motherland in that harbour?”

Aura sharpened the look in her eyes, whereupon Princess Freya answered

unconcerned.

“Of course I will pay an appropriate share of the profit to the royal family.”

“No will do. That is one thing I cannot allow. The intercontinental trade is to be conducted only between the Carpa Royal Family and the Uppsala Royal Family. Nothing will change that.”

“Then what are we supposed to do with the ships we build at the shipyard? Their transfer could be considered a kind of trade, too?”

“The Uppsala Kingdom will get the even numbered ships out of the first ten ships built in the shipyard for free. If they want more ships after that, any future ship from the shipyard needs to stop in Valentia once, where it then will be sold in a deal between both royal families.”

This compromise ensured that the intercontinental trade was conducted under the control of the Carpa Royal Family.

Giving away five large sailing ships for free definitely hurt the Carpa Royal Family, but it was still better than allowing the harbour of Princess Freya to interfere with the intercontinental trade.

No one knew what the future may hold, but her harbour would at least be more influenced by the Uppsala Kingdom than the Carpa Kingdom while Princess Freya was alive.

If such a harbour were to trade with its motherland, the Uppsala Kingdom, on its own, the Carpa Kingdom would gravely lose its standing with the Uppsala Kingdom in the intercontinental trade.

Nevertheless, Aura could not outright decline the proposal from Princess Freya, because it would cost her the ship and ironwork technology she was going to offer.

Hence Aura sought to soften the conditions by complying with the short-term desire of the princess.

“Five large sailing ships for free...”

Now it was Princess Freya’s turn to fall silent and think.

The Uppsala Kingdom was a highly developed country, but their military

strength was that of a middle power at best. A total of five large sailing ship for free was an extremely attractive offer to them.

In the long run, it was obviously a lot more profitable, if they were to get the permission to do trading in the harbour from Princess Freya, but it would take time to see the result of it and the Uppsala Kingdom would still profit enough from an established intercontinental trade in general, even without pushing that condition through here.

Then it should be alright to accept the offer. Princess Freya reached that conclusion, but still faced one problem.

Unlike Queen Aura, who had all the decision-making power in the country, Princess Freya was nothing but the crown princess.

Accordingly, it was already pretty scandalous that she proposed a marriage without the approval of her father or brother, but a contract for an intercontinental trade was on a whole different level.

Princess Freya was given the “Yellow Leaves” and set out with the mission to “develop an intercontinental trade route to the South Continent for the homeland”.

In a sense, the negotiations of the intercontinental trade were a royal decree.

Therefore it proved difficult for her to give an immediate answer to such important matters at her own discretion. At the same time, her homeland was too far away to wait for orders from the higher-ups.

“...Well, in that case, could we arrange that the trading in the harbour does require the approval of the Carpa Royal Family first?

I really would like to get your permission to lay the foundations for possible trade at the harbour in the future.”

Princess Freya persistently continued the negotiations in order to make it possible that the principality and the Uppsala Kingdom could directly trade with each other in the future.

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“I will excuse myself now. Thank you very much for the fruitful collaboration

today, Your Majesties.”

“Not at all. You have my gratitude as well. We should repeat this at some point.”

“I am glad you were pleased, Princess Freya.”

The Princess and Queen were bidding each other farewell with a smile on their faces, whereas Zenjirou forced a smile with a somewhat stiff expression.

The door closed shortly after and Princess Freya and her female bodyguard were gone. Thereupon Zenjirou flopped himself onto the couch like a marionette that had its string cut.

“...It sure was fruitful for everyone. Except for me.”

When her husband uttered scornful words for once, the Queen did not reply for a moment and pondered in silence.

The two of them might be all alone right now, but they were still in the Royal Palace and not in the Inner Palace, so Zenjirou was technically picking his words in face of the Queen, but his phrasing came across even chillier because of it.

“.....”

As a matter of fact, Aura would only hurt Zenjirou with anything she said now, considering her position.

Just like he had mentioned, it had been extremely fruitful for Aura in her role as the Queen. The ironwork and shipbuilding technology as well as the intercontinental trade with the North Continent had been brought to the table. There had practically been no way to dismiss the matter anymore, when presented with such favourable conditions.

As of now, Princess Freya was not yet officially acknowledged as a concubine, but it was pretty much set in stone that she would accompany Zenjirou to the marriage ceremony as his partner for a start.

To begin with, the real negotiations over becoming a concubine and a trade agreement could not be debated in the Carpa Kingdom alone. Princess Freya would have to return home to the North Continent with the “Yellow Leaves” and get the approval from her father before returning. Thus the matter would

at least still take another year to settle.

Everything Princess Freya agreed to here was based on her own judgment, so it was still possible that the deal was called off in the future.

Nevertheless, it did not change the fact that it had paved the way for a “concubine” if everything went well.

Zenjirou had loathed that more than anything, so he unconsciously heaved a sigh. He had been more or less prepared for it, but the inevitable had finally come.

“Zenjirou, I am the Queen and you are a member of the Royal Family. The Royal Family has to prioritize the welfare of the country over their own emotions.”

The Queen dared to take a strict approach while she slowly sat down besides him. Then she reached out for the folded hands of her husband with her left hand.

It did look like a casual and natural gesture, but in truth, Aura was suppressing a deadly fear at heart while she did so.

What if her husband were to turn away from her the moment she sat down next to him? What if her husband were to push away her extended hand?

But these gloomy assumptions turned out to be completely baseless.

Zenjirou unfolded his hands and softly grasped the hand of his wife. Their ten fingers firmly entangled into each other, he turned his head and smile at his wife sitting next to him.

“I am aware. I am far from perfect, but please take good care of me.”

His stiff choice of words contrasted with his soft tone and gentle smile. And the warmth conveyed through their hands completely relieved the Queen of her anxiety and nervousness.

“Yes. The prosperity of the royal family and the kingdom comes first of all. But as long as it does not contradict that objective, it should be alright that royalty pursues their own happiness as well. I will do my utmost for that, too.”

“How reassuring.”

Hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder, the Queen and Prince Consort then bathed in the comfortable body heat of the other as they relaxed for a while.

Intermission: The Twin Kingdom takes Actions

While the Carpa Royal Palace was in uproar over the audacious act from the Princess of the North Continent, the Prince and Princess from the Twin Kingdom of Sharrow and Jilbell were having a somewhat serious discussion in the part of the Royal Palace that had been rented out to them.

“Wow, what a surprise. The northern Princess sure is assertive.”

“Yes, you can say that again. I suppose the North Continent handles things differently after all?”

Although she usually was no fan of gossip, Princess Bona also seemed interested this time as she responded to Prince Francesco with a glittering sparkle of curiosity in her purple eyes.

She was born into a low-ranking noble family and still focussed more on her Bestowal Magic and engraving techniques, even after she had become royalty, so she had only internalized the bare minimum of royal etiquette and attitude, making her moral values slightly different from the typical member of the royal family.

“I would never even dream of having the courage to make a proposal of my own accord in public. Actually, will she be alright? The marriage between royalty is pretty much a taboo, is it not?”

Her worried interjection revealed how trivial her level of knowledge actually was.

Prince Francesco on the other hand only looked like a carefree idiot on a glance and was an idiot in actual fact, but was a true-born royalty, so he at least knew more about these kind of things than Princess Bona.

“Not quite. Most royalty on the North Continent don’t have a bloodline magic, so marriages between royalty aren’t a taboo there. If anything, they are endorsed.

Going by our standards, it would be more like a marriage between influential nobles in the same country.”

“Oh, I see. So something like a feudal lord moving up the ladder and gaining independence?”

Princess Bona had never been the stupid type, so she was quick on the uptake.

“Yeah, more or less. Therefore a political marriage with another country is pretty common for Princess Freya. If anything, His Majesty Zenjirou and Her Majesty Aura should be the most shocked by it. The Carpa Kingdom is a major power here after all.”

“Yes, you are right. Then I assume it is quite likely that Princess will be turned down?”

Her expression as she asked this worriedly looked like she was genuinely concerned about Princess Freya.

“Hmm? I wonder. They currently do have a dangerous shortage of practitioners for their bloodline magic due to the previous war, so it would be wise to have His Majesty Zenjirou take a concubine. Princess Freya may not hold a bloodline magic herself, but her magical power is by no means low.

The matter might actually work out easier than expected.”

Considering the secret pact between the Carpa Royal Family and the Sharrow Royal Family, it should actually be a problem, if it worked out, but Prince Francesco was not bothered by it in the slightest and mentioned this unconcerned.

Technically also a part of the Sharrow Royal Family, Princess Bona did not know of these circumstances, though, so she nodded admiringly.

“I see. Then His Majesty Zenjirou will probably be ‘made’ to take more concubines in the future. I feel for him.”

She expressed her sympathy for Zenjirou like that. Her moral values were almost identical to his, so in a way, she understood him better than anyone else.

Only wealthy merchants or higher nobility perceived multiple wives at the same time as a blessing. Monogamy was the norm for commoners or lower nobility and taking a second or third wife would only cause unnecessary trouble.

Princess Bona understood that by nature, since she was born as a low-ranking noble.

And it was probably something a true-born royalty like Prince Francesco could never relate to.

"Hmm? Her Majesty Aura is a woman of character and Princess Freya is a fine lady as well. His Majesty Zenjirou is actually in an enviable position.

But well, if you're that worried about him, why not run for a concubine position yourself?"

As always, Prince Francesco wore his childish smile without the slightest shred of malice as he proposed the crucial question.

However, Princess Bona had no way to know about the inner workings of the Sharro Royal Family, so her reaction turned out to be rather boring.

"Oh please. You are always so quick to speak in jest, Prince Francesco. Even if we are by ourselves here, you may not tell such an heedless joke."

When she scolded the older prince like a child that had done something bad, her expression revealed neither shame, nor surprise.

It was the expression of someone, who literally never had considered becoming a concubine for Zenjirou, not even as a joke.

This was not even a matter of being attracted to him or not. She was just not envisioning this kind of development to begin with.

Princess Bona was profoundly convinced that she was going back to the Twin Kingdom of Sharro and Jilbell soon. And Zenjirou was the Prince Consort of a different country.

So before their social standing or the taboo for marriages between royal families with bloodline magic even came up for discussion, she did not see him as a potential marriage candidate in the first place, since they were going to live

their lives too far from each other from now on.

But the blonde Prince said suggestively with a smirk as if to spur her on unnecessarily.

"But Bona, you saw the pair rings of Her Majesty Aura and His Majesty Zenjirou, right? I mean those pretty rings with three diamonds. Apparently they are called 'wedding rings' and are something that men give their future wives in the world of His Majesty Zenjirou."

"I-In other words, I would get a fantastic ring like that, if I were to marry him?"

Swallowing her saliva with a gulp, Princess Bona completely changed her expression into a dead serious one.

"Yes. But right now, he can't interact with his world anymore, so any wedding ring for a concubine would have to be from this world."

When Prince Francesco pointed out this fact, which would have been obvious after a bit of thinking, Princess Bona trembled with realisation.

"P-Prince Francesco! Please refrain from making vicious allusions. I was almost tricked, you know!"

"Oh come on, don't be tricked by a joke like that. It makes me feel bad for telling it."

Scratching his head with a troubled look, Prince Francesco averted his eyes from the angry glare of Princess Bona and kept it to himself that he was thinking how "naïve this girl got as soon as it concerned jewellery".

*

At night of the same day.

Prince Francesco was sitting all by himself at the desk on a rare occasion and working on something.

The candlestick-shaped magic tool on top of the desk had the "Flame Ball Creation" magic worked into it.

Maintaining a spherical form through magical power, its flame was quite

unlike a natural one. It did not flicker and evenly enlightened the surroundings, so it was extremely convenient as a light source. Needless to say, the flame was still fire, so it did not only provide light, but also warmth.

Prince Francesco held the tip of his peculiar stylus, which used white natural stone for the handle and iron for the point, into the round flame, then wrote letters on the dragonskin parchment lying before him on the desk with the heated pen.

“I don’t really want to be the bearer of bad news, but I can’t really lie to Father, either. So, how do I do this?”

His Majesty Zenjirou was proposed to by Princess Freya of the North Continent. Our little Bona and His Majesty Zenjirou are getting along well, but neither side seems to be harbouring romantic feelings.

“Guess this will do.”

He inscribed burnt marks in form of words into the dragonskin parchment with the hot stylus.

That dragonskin parchment was actually a magic tool called “Burning Pair Parchment”. Two of them formed a pair and they had the feature that when you burnt one of them, the other would show the exact same kind of burn.

Originally, it had been invented to light up a fire from a safe distance, but someone noticed the trick with the burns and came up with the idea to “write letters through burn marks”. Ever since, the parchments were used to communicate over long distances like in this case.

“Well, it’s a matter of opinion, though. I guess it’s good news for the Sharow Family that His Majesty Zenjirou, royalty from another country, is taking a concubine. According to the secret contract, any child between His Majesty Zenjirou and his concubine will have to study abroad in the Twin Kingdom after all.

Oh, but I wonder if my father and grandfather will use this as an opportunity to push a princess of the Sharow Family onto His Majesty Zenjirou as a concubine, too.”

The first candidate would be no one else but Princess Bona. She was an

extremely convenient “pawn” for the Sharrow Family.

Born as a low-ranking noble, she just had enough magical power to activate the bloodline magic.

But she had a docile personality and her appearance, although plain, was by no means bad-looking. Except for jewellery, which was her occupation, hobby and raison d'être all at the same time, she practically had no attachment to desires. And the complicated circumstances relating to her upbringing had earned her a personality that was so exploitable it was almost laughable.

In other words, she had internalized to obey the orders from royalty by birth, because she was a low-ranking noble, and later took her obligations as a member of the royal family for granted, because she had been raised as one.

Although she had a strong sense of responsibility for her position as royalty, she readily accepted orders from higher ranking royalty. Moreover, she could naturally interact with people from any social class without putting them off, since she had received an education for low-ranking nobility as well as royalty.

Accordingly, Princess Bona should be able to naturally charm Zenjirou, no matter his personality. Or at least it was quite unlikely that she would be hated.

The Sharrow Royal Family was partly right and partly wrong with that speculation.

“Well, His Majesty Zenjirou and Bona do get along well, but a bit too well, I would say. Or more precisely, they’re ‘birds of a feather’.”

Prince Francesco remembered how relaxed Zenjirou and Bona were always talking with each other, and grinned.

It certainly was impressive to have grown that close within a mere three months, but their intimacy was obviously not the sexual kind.

“Hmm, they’re more like two peaceful herbivores snuggling together in the sun.”

The way of love could be classified into “active” and “passive” and love would not blossom unless one side was aggressive to some extent.

Amongst two passive herbivores, neither side would go for the kill, namely

begin courtship. Zenjirou was by no means oblivious to love, but he generally remained passive.

He would be responsive, when approached by the other side such as Aura's action on their first meeting or Princess Freya's action a few days ago, but he would almost never initiate an approach by himself.

The same applied to Princess Bona. Both of them were the type to wait for an approach to which they could react. As a result, the status quo was dragging on endlessly.

"As I see it, the two of them would still just happily chat with each other after a hundred years."

Even though he was of that view, Prince Francesco had no intention to write it down on the "Burning Pair Parchment".

He did not want to get in the way of his father and grandfather, but he did not want to help them, either.

The socializing was going well for both Prince Francesco and Princess Bona right now. He could do without any trouble that arose by creating unnecessary stir.

He once again put the stylus into the flame of the magic tool, as it had cooled down during his monologue, and continued to write.

Princess Freya hails from the Uppsala Kingdom. It is one of the few countries on the North Continent that are not under the influence of the 'Church'. I believe it would cause no problem to make contact with them. Please give your permission.

Since he stayed out of politics back home, Prince Francesco did not know all the details, but the Twin Kingdom of Sharow and Jilbell generally forbid negotiations with the North Continent or more precisely: with the "Church".

Just to be safe, they ought to have nothing to do with Princess Freya as well.

But Prince Francesco was a curious soul and enthusiastic craftsman, albeit not as much as Princess Bona, so he really wanted a connection to the Uppsala Kingdom, which was said to be a prominent technology developed country on

the North Continent.

“Their high level of technology is obvious at a glance, when you look at the armours and weapons of the guards. Most of them are crafted rather crudely, though, so it might not be all that worthwhile for jewellery.

Ah, but the ornaments on the spear from Miss Skathi were splendid. I’m sure I could learn a thing or two from that.

Man, our country technically stems from the North Continent, too, so how did this difference come to be?”

His mumbling faded into oblivion without being heard by anyone.

Chapter 04: A Number of Arrangements

On a certain day, several days after the informal negotiations had occurred under the pretext of giving Aura and Zenjirou the goats.

“Fuah...”

As always, Aura was attending to her duties in the office of the Royal Palace, when she stretched herself on top of her chair in order to shake off her tiredness.

“Uh, Guh...!”

It was still noon right now and extremely unusual for Aura to be this tired while the sun was high up.

“I have not seen you this tired in a long time, Your Majesty.”

So unusual in fact that Secretary Fabio, standing at attention besides her, had to address it with a doubtful tone.

Aura was pretty strict about her health. Proper sleep as well as nutrition were the two keystones for good health. She might have neglected these on the battlefield during the great war, but now in times of peace, it was odd beyond doubt that she ended up sleep-deprived.

Proud of his outstanding memory, the slender-faced Secretary recalled the schedule of his Master for the past few days, but could not pinpoint a reason for it in particular.

“Is anything preventing you from getting enough sleep?”

The Queen answered the question of her trusted retainer with a wry smile and half-opened eyes.

“Hmm, well, yeah.”

“Is something weighing on your mind?”

“No, it is more of a practical problem.”

“You mean, you are going to bed too late?”

"Not quite. If anything, I spent more time in the bedroom now. Just not 'sleeping' though."

"...Oh, I see. Speaking of, it [e]is[/e] the right time for a second one."

The middle-aged Secretary was convinced now.

There was only one reason why an intimate married couple would lack sleep, even though they were spending more time in the bedroom.

It certainly was pleasant to see that Aura and Zenjirou still got along as well as always despite the relationship drama encompassing Zenjirou at the moment. And just like Secretary Fabio had said, the point in time was not unfavourable to make the second royal child.

The Queen seemed to have somehow shaken off her tiredness by stretching herself on her chair and took a deep breath before getting back on topic.

"Anyway, it has been decided for good that Princess Freya will accompany Zenjirou to the marriage ceremony of General Puyol.

I somehow managed to reach an understanding with the nobility, who pushed for a partner for Zenjirou, in the past few days. Fortunately enough, the most troublesome and unyielding opponent could not take action this time around."

It goes without saying that the most troublesome and unyielding opponent referred to General Puyol, the main figure of this marriage ceremony himself. Knowing him, he would have assertively tried to install his little sister Fatima Guillén as the partner for Zenjirou without doubt, if this had been any other marriage ceremony.

However, he was kind of forced to take a backseat just this once. Too busy with all the preparations for his own wedding, the General himself could not take action himself and his little sister Fatima had to attend the ceremony as part of the bridegroom's party anyway.

Much to his regret, General Puyol thus had no choice but to stand on the sidelines as a result, even though he usually stopped at nothing to expand his influence and position.

"Princess Freya as his partner, hmm? Then I can assume she will be accepted

as a concubine for Master Zenjirou in the future?"

Her trusted retainer narrowed his eyes to slits and inquired with a monotone voice, whereupon Aura nodded shortly.

"Yes. At this point, she has only been appointed as his partner for the marriage ceremony, but you can basically start preparing with that in mind.

Of course the finalization of the intercontinental trade agreement with the Uppsala Kingdom takes priority and depending on its outcome, the matter may end up being called off, though."

The conditions for accepting Princess Freya as a concubine were the benefits from an intercontinental trade agreement and the promised know-how for the iron manufacture as well as for the shipbuilding. If they simply wanted to increase their practitioners for the "Bestowal Magic" through a concubine, there were more appropriate women within the kingdom than a cumbersome princess from a different country.

The Uppsala Kingdom was an admittedly technology advanced country, but was trailing behind, when it came to magic, so Princess Freya was not really blessed with a remarkable amount of magical power according to the norm of the Carpa Kingdom.

A not so insignificant amount of the local nobility was against the unprecedented case of taking foreign royalty as a concubine. Without a dowry in form of an intercontinental trade agreement, Aura was determined to break off the talks at any moment.

Catching on these circumstances, the slender-faced Secretary pondered for a while, then answered.

"Understood. I shall make preparations accordingly. Having said this, I can only provide the necessary documents and physical materials at best.

Your Majesty will have to take care of the emotional element. I hope that will not pose a problem?"

The emotional element, in other words: he was asking whether she could convince Zenjirou of this matter properly.

Getting the hardest nut to crack by her Secretary, the Queen showed a wry smile and looked up to the ceiling.

"As always, he fully consents to it from a logical point of view. Even if he were to take Princess Freya as a concubine now, he would not cause any problems on the surface.

The problematic part is his frame of mind, though. I am doing my utmost right now to appease him... It did come at the cost of my well-earned sleep in the past few days, though."

"I see. Well, it is an important task only you can accomplish, Your Majesty."

The Queen spoke relatively open about the night activities, whereas her Secretary draped himself in apathy as he acknowledged it.

At this point of time, the current night activities of the royal couple had undoubtedly the main purpose of making a second child, but they served as a way to comfort the heart and soul of Zenjirou all the same.

To begin with, the main reason he had accepted his fate of being summoned to a different world, was because he fell in love with Queen Aura at first sight. Moreover, his love for Aura only grew during the following newlywed lifestyle and its charm had not broken even once up till now.

Therefore sexual intercourse with Aura was the best medicine for Zenjirou's anxious state of mind. But he had been living in "abstinence" for more than half a year, so his sex drive turned out to be greater than Aura had expected and she had a hard time keeping up.

"At least he seems to have enough stamina in this field for when a concubine is added. The question is, though, whether he will see another woman beside me as a partner at all."

The Queen voiced her misgivings like that while she frowned and looked glum, but a closer look revealed the glint of triumph shining through her reddish brown pupils.

As the Queen, she had to keep the prosperity of the kingdom in mind, so Zenjirou's monogamy posed a problem, but as a woman, as his wife, she could not help but rejoice at the fact that he only loved her alone and paid no

attention to other women.

"You are the only one capable of persuading him in that regard, so I am counting on you, Your Majesty."

Either way, I definitely approve the making of a second child right now. It would be a bit risky to welcome a concubine into the royal family while Prince Carlos is the only legal successor."

If the concubine were to give birth to a child that inherited the bloodline magic, it could happen that this child was acknowledged as a successor, even if only temporarily, in case something happened to the sole legal successor.

The only way to avoid that risk was to make more children with the legal wife. If it had not been the Queen and her Prince Consort, but the King and his Queen Consort, they would get ready to make a second child as soon as the Queen Consort had recovered enough from the previous delivery.

"I know that. But I never would have guessed that it would be this strenuous to reign conscientiously and take care of the next generation at the same time."

"And a concubine is meant to take a part of that burden off your shoulders."

When the Queen complained, her Secretary presented the fact in an indifferent tone.

"Right. In consideration of the continuity of the royal family and the prosperity of the kingdom, a concubine is indispensable for my husband after all."

The Queen nodded, whereupon her Secretary brought up another problematic matter.

"But it also could cause some problems, if you were to have a second child at this point in time. Let us assume you conceive right away like before, then it should take about two or three months for your pregnancy to become apparent. But the intercontinental trade agreement is unlikely to have reached a conclusion by that time. In other words, there will be no arrangements yet to accept Princess Freya as a concubine.

In that case, it will be more than likely that the local nobility will push for a

different concubine to ‘bridge that vacant period of time’ first.”

“...I can already see the mood of my husband worsening even further.”

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While the Queen pursued her duties in the office of the Royal Palace, the husband of the Queen alias Zenjirou was playing a video game in the living room of the Inner Palace, still dressed in his pyjama.

After a passionate night with his wife in the bedroom, he had gone back to sleep as soon as he had seen her off to work, and when he woke up again, he started to play games in his pyjama.

It was a slovenly way of life that practically epitomized depravity.

“Here I... GO!”

With the controller in hand, Zenjirou imitated a pitching motion by swinging his arm down with all his might. In line with this, the pitcher character displayed on the screen threw a ball.

Thrown with a fictional speed of one-hundred and fifty-one km/h, the fastball headed for the high inside of the strike zone of the batter standing in the right batter’s box, but the batter casually swung his bat and mercilessly shot the full-power fastball from Zenjirou’s character into the left stands.

A homerun.

“Aw, damn it.”

This result made Zenjirou abruptly lose his motivation, so he turned off the console with the point of the toe without bothering to bend over and tossed the controller onto the carpet.

Then he unmannerly flopped himself onto the black leather couch, where he heaved a deep sigh.

“...Man, it’s no use. I can’t concentrate at all.”

Ever since Princess Freya had been chosen as his partner for the coming marriage ceremony, Zenjirou had lost some of his inner tranquillity, so Aura had given him a special vacation for today out of consideration for him, but

unfortunately, he did not know what to do with all this free time.

“Hmm, I know I’m not supposed to, but maybe I can distract myself, when I play a game against the waiting maids.”

Still sitting on the couch, Zenjirou looked down on the game controller lying on the carpet and muttered that to himself, but as expected, he had no intention to put that idea into practice.

He was lending the portable game console to some of the waiting maids, but he had never played a game together with them.

Because it would appear like he was giving preference to these maids, when the “master happily spent time with them”, even if it was something peculiar like a video game.

Zenjirou truly wanted to have a good relationship with the waiting maids of the Inner Palace, but not even once had he considered the intimate kind of relationship between a man and a woman with them. The last thing he wanted was for the situation to turn awkward, because he raised such expectations by mistake or made them be on guard against him.

“So I finally get a day off, but I’ve no idea what to do...”

Grumbling like that, he exchanged his blue-striped pyjama for a T-shirt and cotton pants all too late.

Since he only ever left the Inner Palace for work, it meant that a vacation equalled to spending the whole day in the Inner Palace.

During his university days, he had mainly went out with friends, when he had too much time on his hands, and he no longer had any real free time as a working adult, so he was not really familiar with killing time indoors by himself.

Right after transferring into this world, Zenjirou had been eager to watch his pile of DVDs or play his still sealed games, but he was not all that fixated on them anymore lately.

Some of the games still awaited their completion and numerous DVDs were still unwatched, but his initial passionate dedication to them was long gone.

Above all, he just could not enjoy them anymore, even if he wanted to,

because the serious issue at hand weighed on his mind.

"Argh. I feel bad for Aura, 'cause she went out of her way to give me a day off, but I might as well tackle the matter head-on in order to free my mind."

After his quick change of clothes, Zenjirou took paper and a three-coloured ball pen from the desk with his computer in the corner of the room and once again sat down on the black leather couch.

"Hmm, one thing at a time. First of all: General Puyol will held his marriage ceremony in the March of Guzzle.

I'm going to attend this ceremony as a representative for Aura. But the etiquette more or less dictates you to attend it with a partner. And the public generally thinks you have a thing for each other, when you and your partner are unmarried.

Lastly, it's been decided that I'll take Princess Freya to the ceremony as my partner."

When Zenjirou wrote "attend ceremony together with Princess Freya" down on the paper, he vented an heavy sigh.

Strictly speaking, he was already married to Queen Aura, but it was normal for male royalty to have multiple wives. Even more so in his case, where he and Aura were the only adult royalty of the Carpa Kingdom. You could even go so far as to say that everyone in the country was hoping he would take more wives.

So when he took a "young, unmarried woman to a marriage ceremony", that woman was automatically seen has a favourable candidate for the position of his concubine.

And worst of all, the person in question, Princess Freya herself, was the most eager about becoming his concubine.

"Above all, she'll definitely become my official second wife, if our country establishes an 'intercontinental trade' with her homeland, the Uppsala Kingdom, later on."

The following sigh was even heavier than the first.

"Well, I was always told that this would happen, so it just means that the

inevitable has finally come, but to be honest, I could have really done without it.”

With a distant look in his eyes, Zenjirou viewed the wide garden beyond the opened wooden door.

He was an extremely average person with rather conservative moral values and not the kind of adventurous guy that gladly hooked himself another woman while he already had a child and intimate relationship with his beloved wife.

“I’m glad I had that heart to heart talk with Aura before, because I wouldn’t have been sure about her feelings for me otherwise.”

Back then, when they both had laid bare their complains and wishes, Aura had said: “As a woman, I want to monopolize you as well.”

In other words, the reason she actively pushed for a concubine for him was solely because of her obligations as the Queen. It did contradict her feelings as a woman.

Zenjirou told himself that he had to keep that in mind.

“If it’s true, Aura should be taking the worst hit from it, even with her different moral values in this polygamy culture. If she really loves me, that is.”

From his point of view, it was worrisome and troublesome at the same time to have to take a second wife, even though he already had one he loved very much.

But it was whole different matter for Aura. Her beloved husband was going to marry another woman. It would come as no surprise if she were to act irrational, because of jealousy.

“If I were in her shoes...”

Zenjirou imagined such a scenario.

What if Aura were to get herself another man?

For example, what if she suddenly said something like this: “We already have a child together. So it is time I spread our bloodline by making a child with General Puyol or Sir Raffaelo as well. Oh, do not worry. It will only be physical. You will always be the only one I love.”

His wild fantasy was definitely unthinkable in the patriarchic society of the Carpa Kingdom, but it was easily conceivable from a purely practical point of view for passing on the bloodline magic.

Aura sleeping with someone else than him.

“Just imagining it drives me crazy...”

He muttered with a flat voice.

Was Aura feeling like this right now? Was she suppressing her own feelings and fulfilling her duty as the Queen by giving his husband a concubine?

Once again, Zenjirou was reminded of his impotence and the admirability of his wife.

Needless to say, it was pointless to range their mindsets on the same level, since Zenjirou only had monogamous moral values, whereas Aura was born and raised in an polygamous environment. But it definitely held true that the mental pressure from taking a concubine weighed more on the wife than the husband from a sensible point of view.

“Guess I can only make the best of it, since it can’t be avoided...”

Somewhat becalmed, Zenjirou shifted his attention to something else in order to make effective use of his day off.

“Well, it’s not all bad news with Princess Freya. I mean, the dishes did increase.”

Standing up from the couch with these words, he moved to the five-door refrigerator in the corner of the room.

The silver jug he took out from it contained goat milk, freshly milked this morning.

Every day, just like Nicolai, the young caretaker detached by Princess Freya, had instructed them to, they heated the milk once without boiling it, then let it cool down a bit before putting it in the refrigerator.

The leftovers were disposed of on the next day. It was a bit of a waste, but the only ones consuming the goat milk in the Carpa Kingdom were currently Zenjirou and the baby goats, so unless they disposed of it regularly, the

refrigerator would overspill with goat milk in no time.

Pouring the milk from the jug into a glass, Zenjirou took a sip of the white fluid and swallowed it with a sour face.

"Yeah... it stinks quite a bit."

He had only ever known of pasteurized milk, so he could not help but consider this goat milk as smelly. Kind of smelling of animal and grass alike, the scent was difficult to put into words and because of it, Zenjirou still could not recommend the milk to others in good conscience.

He had the impression that the people of the South Continent would become negatively biased towards the goat milk for life, if they were to taste it with this scent for the first time, since they had never drunken milk from livestock here before.

"Nicolai said the scent can be improved with a better environment and food, so there's still hope."

Nicolai had wanted to put off the improvement of the taste and scent for the time being, because the goats still had not settled in their new environment and their health came first.

Fortunately enough, the young man did not only know how to raise the goats, he apparently also knew how to make butter, raw cream and even cheese from their milk.

It would seem that the man called Nicolai could be trusted with everything related to the goats. The report said that almost every day, he was sleeping together with the goats in the stable or grazing ground in the courtyard of the Royal Palace, and passionately took care of them as though as they were his lovers.

Once they could make dairy products, the dishes would go beyond just the milk itself, enriching Zenjirou's eating habits.

He had a pile of sweet recipes he could not rely on so far, because there had been no butter or raw cream. Besides, he had gotten better at reading and writing the language of the western part of the South Continent lately, so he wanted to translate as many recipes as possible and share them with Vanessa,

the head of the cooking department in the Inner Palace.

Her talent spoke for itself. For example, even if she could not reproduce something according to the recipe, she arranged it herself and made it into something great. Moreover, she had gotten an idea of his tastes these days, so she was indispensable in the Inner Palace now.

"Hmm, I feel bad for Nicolai, but I guess, the goat milk will only be used for sampling for now."

With these words, Zenjirou emptied his glass into the wooden bucket standing next to the refrigerator. After that he took out the cold water mixed with fruit juice, poured it into a new glass and drank it.

Without cleaning them up, he put the two used glasses and the bucket with the disposed goat milk back onto the shelf next to the refrigerator.

Zenjirou was still not used to it, but the common sense of this world deemed it scandalous for male royalty to "do the dishes", so he had no choice but to leave it to the waiting maids.

"Oh, reminds me, the shampoo's almost used up. Well, I did finish a test product, so I guess I'll let the maids be my guinea pigs, even if I feel bad about it."

Leaving the refrigerator behind, his feet carried him to another corner of the room, where he was storing all of his inventions.

It mainly encompassed numerous handiworks Zenjirou had tried his hands at in order to enrich his lifestyle.

An electromagnet made from a silver wire coil and a rechargeable dry battery, or a very weak static magnet based on the aforementioned, among other things.

From this collection, Zenjirou picked up a wooden box with several hand-sized silver jars in it.

These jars were filled with the experimental shampoo and rinse he had made. The soap shampoo was created by dissolving the self-made soap.

With the help of the downloaded instructions for self-made shampoo from

the internet, Zenjirou was mixing it with varying amounts of beeswax, citrus juice, wheat flour or fragrance oil in order to come up with a cleansing shampoo that did not damage the hair and scalp.

"I think I'll let Aura have the rest of the real shampoo and use the self-made one for myself once it's passable."

As a man with short hair, it would not bother him, if his hair were to become a little bit brittle. On the contrary, it would infuriate him, if the beautiful straight red hair of his wife would lose its glamour.

"Now that I think about it, her hair was already beautiful, when I first came here. And other women also have beautiful hair. If my soap shampoo and rinse won't work out, we might as well go back to the traditional hair care of the Carpa Kingdom."

He suddenly thought of that, but if possible, he only wanted to use it as a last resort. To begin with, the people of the Carpa Kingdom did not take baths as often as the people of Modern Japan, so they obviously did not wash their hair every day, either.

A neat person would wash its hair once every three days, everyone else once a week. The perfumed oil had been invented for that very reason, as it masked the bad smell of the hair and let it keep its glamour. But Zenjirou would rather not sleep together with a woman, who treated her hair with perfumed oil instead of washing it.

"The fluid soap with perfumed oil is already safe to use on the body, so when I get the shampoo and rinse done, I only need cleansing foam."

Well, I'm fine with a diluted version of the fluid soap, though."

Zenjirou had never encountered any problems with rough skin due to sunburns or cleansers back in Japan. His skin was not all that sensitive, so there was no real need for him to fuss about the soap to such an extent.

"Maybe I can just leave it to the merchants as soon as I complete the shampoo and rinse? I already did that with the fluid soap and there were no problems, but I guess I better ask Aura before."

The fluid soap Zenjirou managed to make with perfumed oil was being sold as

a proper product by now, because he had passed on the recipe to the merchant frequenting the Inner Palace.

Needless to say, the business-minded merchant had not been satisfied with selling such a rare and useful item at the Inner Palace alone, so he apparently had gotten the permission from Queen Aura to sell it to the public as well.

It did not sell outstanding numbers, because warm baths were more or less a luxury for the upper class, but with the word-of-mouth recommendations from those, who already used it, and the seal of quality from the “purveyor to the court”, it was steadily gaining popularity, especially with the noble women.

If the shampoo and rinse were to circulate in the same way, even the nobles in the Royal Palace might assume the habit of taking a bath every day?

“Nah, that would be too much of a good thing.”

Zenjirou denied his own dreamery.

Living in the Inner Palace, he tended to forget it, but a warm bath was considered an extremely pricey luxury in terms of facility and maintenance expenses in this world.

Even during the Vibrant Season, the season with the lowest temperatures, the Carpa Kingdom was still warm enough to bathe with cold water without problems, so those, who spent a lot of money to prepare a warm bath, were a minority, even in the upper-class circles.

Having said this, ambitious nobles with daughters at a marriageable age might suddenly start to adopt warm baths, if word were to get around that Prince Consort Zenjirou was “urging Queen Aura, whom he spent the bed with, and the waiting maids, whom he lived together with in the Inner Palace, to clean themselves up every day in a warm bath”.

“Now that I think about it, Ancient Rome sure was advanced with their public thermal baths all around. It was just an elaborated sauna for warming yourself up, though.

Wait? Sauna?”

Zenjirou suddenly thought of something.

“That reminds me of the sauna culture in Northern Europe on Earth. Maybe the home country from Princess Freya has the same culture?”

In that case, it might be better to consider building a sauna in the Inner Palace, too.

The persuasion from Aura in the past few days must have yielded fruits. Zenjirou was unknowingly accepting the possible future of marrying Princess Freya down the road as he held that fleeting thought in the mind.

*

At night of the same day.

The royal couple sat across each other on the couches after their dinner and bath as always, discussing the important matters taking place in the near future.

“Then I’ll take a dragon carriage to the marriage ceremony?”

“Yes. I sent you to Valentia with ‘Teleport’ before, because it was an emergency, but this time, it is just an ordinary marriage ceremony during the Vibrant Season.

I know it will not be comfortable, but you will have to take the slow dragon carriage to get there.”

The Queen explained it in detail to Zenjirou, when he asked.

“Okay. The ride itself won’t be a problem. I rather fear the company. But I’ll do my best.”

While he answered like that, his gaze was not directed at the face of his wife, but rather focussed on her cleavage.

Fresh out of the bath, Aura was currently wearing her nightgown, a red negligee with a V-necked mesh. In the last few days, since the ban of the night activates had been lifted, she was often wearing revealing clothes, probably trying to appeal to her husband.

Zenjirou would awkwardly avert his eyes, if this were any other woman, but there was no need to hold back with his beloved wife.

He was smitten with the alluring figure of his wife, illuminated by the white light of the LED floor lamps, and ogled her without reservation.

"I can put on some clothes, when you cannot concentrate on the matter at hand?"

"Sorry. I'm fine. Continue."

When his wife reprimanded him with a wry smile, Zenjirou uttered an inauthentic apology and requested that she stayed the way she was. Aura was not really scolding him for real, either, as she continued without getting changed.

"You will get a carriage for royalty, drawn by eight dragons. It will carry you and your partner, Princess Freya. Skathi will surely be with you as well as a bodyguard for Princess Freya.

And I will assign Ines as your aide."

"Oh, Ines again?"

Zenjirou cocked his head puzzled.

"Mh? Do you have a problem with her?"

So Aura asked him that.

"No, not at all. She really lightened my stay in Valentia. But I just thought it must be a lot of work for her."

Aura put her left hand on her chin and mused a while in reaction to his words.

"Hmm, who else could I assign? Margret? No, she will not do. I would not be free of worry with her."

I feel bad for Ines, but she is the most suited for the job."

"Mh, okay. Then I'll do my best not to trouble her all too much during the trip."

It must be true, when Aura insisted on it. Taking care of royalty outside the Inner Palace was certainly not a job everyone could do.

Incidentally, Margret was a young waiting maid, whose trademark was her blonde hair, which was extremely unusual in the Carpa Kingdom.

She was one of the very few waiting maids in the Inner Palace that was not assigned to Zenjirou, but to Aura, so Zenjirou knew relatively little about her, but she definitely must be capable, seeing as Aura mentioned her as an alternative for Ines.

"Anyway, a lot of the nobles from the Capital will attend the marriage ceremony, as you know already."

Most of them will head there early together with the groom General Puyol, but some will want to travel together with you. They will surely use every stop on the way to socialize with you, so deal with them fairly."

Zenjirou unwittingly stared at the ceiling, when Aura described the dark future.

"Oh god, what a pain. But to think that General Puyol would travel by himself. I thought for sure that he would hover over me and give his ambitions a shot."

The Queen shrugged her exposed shoulders as she replied to the doubt of her husband.

"The groom is not only in the spotlight of the marriage ceremony. He has to be in the spotlight on the way to his bride-to-be as well. If royalty were to travel with him, who would be in the spotlight then?"

Therefore it is a matter of course that the groom never travels together with someone of higher status."

"I see. Sounds like a bothersome custom, but it saved me this time."

Zenjirou nodded affirmative, whereupon Aura did the same.

"Raffaelo Márguez will probably be the highest ranking noble amongst the ones travelling with you. You got to know him well in Valentia, right?"

He remembered the face of the man, who had worked as his secretary in Valentia, when Aura mentioned him. As the eldest son of an influential noble, Raffaelo was strangely humble, but affable.

"Oh, him. I'm relatively okay with him."

Even though he had been a former marriage candidate for Queen Aura as well, Zenjirou did not feel the same wariness towards him as with General

Puyol.

Raffaelo was extremely capable and cunning for sure, but he was not as assertive as General Puyol, so he did not prompt you to use caution as much.

"He is a cunning guy in his own way, though. It is quite unlikely that he will cause something on his own accord, but when his string-puller Count Márquez sends him secret orders, he has the necessary skills to execute them absolutely reliable."

Count Márquez is currently taking our side, so I doubt that he will set up a trap for you, but you can never be careful enough."

"Sorry. You're right. I'll be careful."

Zenjirou ducked his head a bit in light of the strict warning from his wife, and uttered an honest apology.

"Oh, and that reminds me, Sir Raffaelo was your marriage candidate just like General Puyol, right? So that means he's still single, right? Then who's his partner? Could it be Lady Octavia?"

He asked the question he had suddenly thought of, so Aura deemed it appropriate to reveal the recently enacted change in the Inner Palace to her husband.

"No. His partner is Keyshia."

Zenjirou widened his eyes in surprise, when a completely unexpected name was brought to the table.

"Eh? Keyshia? You mean the waiting maid Keyshia? You kidding me? So she's actually well-off enough to be chosen as the wife for the successor of the Márquez Family, eh."

He was now living in the Inner Palace for a year and a half and he could already remember the faces of the waiting maids taking care of him with the mentioning of their names alone, so he pictured her in his mind right now.

If his memory proved him right, Keyshia was a relatively old waiting maid with a pretty face befitting the term charming and the perfect proportions that could not even be hidden by clothes.

Objectively speaking, she could probably even qualify as more beautiful than Queen Aura. At the very least, she was currently the most beautiful amongst the waiting maids in the Inner Palace.

“She admittedly comes from a minor family, but Baron Massana is still a feudal lord, so she barely qualifies to marry into the Márquez Family. To begin with, Sir Manuel, the current head of the Márquez Family, prefers a steady prosperity over an instantaneous expansion of power, so I always knew that he would choose someone from a submissive lower-ranked family.

But just like you were suspecting, he dared to picked Keyshia as the wife for his successor because she is a ‘waiting maid of the Inner Palace’.”

“Oh, I knew it...”

The matter-of-fact cue from Aura prompted Zenjirou to fall into despair.

It goes without saying that being a waiting maid of the Inner Palace had its merits. As the waiting maids took care of the Queen and the Prince Consort in the Inner Palace, an isolated space, they obviously knew all kind of things that did not get out to the public.

Of course they could get executed or have their families fall from grace, if they carelessly gossiped about the events in the Inner Palace, so there was not much that they could actually talk about, but even that little information of the Inner Palace was quite valuable at this point in time.

After all, the court nobles practically knew nothing about the man called Zenjirou, who came from another world.

His favourite food. His favourite colour. His favourite season. Or the other way around: His least-liked food. His least-liked colour. His least-liked season. Trivial information like that was priceless to the nobles, who tried to fawn on him.

“That means Count Márquez will actively meddle with me from now on, too?”

Her husband uttered a “Gimme a break!” with an annoyed tone, whereat the Queen cocked her head a bit puzzled.

“Not really. As I have told you before, Count Márquez hates to take risks. At

the very least, I would say he will not do anything to displease you right away.

I reckon he will just collect information for now.”

“He’s marrying off his son just to get information? Or could it be she’s just a partner for the marriage ceremony without an ensuing marriage?”

“As if. Keyshia is immediately retiring from her post as a ‘waiting maid of the Inner Palace’ in order to attend the coming ceremony. The Márquez Family would be done for, if they made her go that far without espousing her, even if the Massana Family ranks far lower than them. Count Márquez would never do something so foolish.

In fact, Raffaelo Márquez has already put in a request for my permission to announce their engagement.”

“Hmm. So he really is marrying off his son just to get information about me. It’s beyond me.”

Zenjirou looked puzzled, whereas Aura said persuasive.

“I just told you that the Massana Family does have enough status to make a marriage with the Márquez Family plausible.

In addition, Keyshia has information about the Inner Palace, so it is not all that strange that she would be chosen as his wife. Above all else, Keyshia herself is a beauty that had once captured the higher society.”

“Yeah, that makes sense.”

Zenjirou clapped his hands together convinced in light of the evidence from Aura.

“Oho, that sounds like you, too, think that Keyshia is quite the beauty, hmm?”

Narrowing her eyes to slits, his wife reacted with a monotone voice, whereupon Zenjirou thought “I messed up” for a second, but instead of digging his grave any deeper by trying to make a random excuse, he opted for an honest answer.

“Well, yeah. To be honest, she’s the most beautiful from all the waiting maids I’ve seen working in the Inner Palace. I’m just stating a fact, though, and there’s nothing more to it.”

The latter half somewhat turned into an excuse after all, but who could blame him? He was praising another woman in front of his wife. It might not be something crimeful, but he did was plagued by a strange sense of guilt.

However, his endeavour turned out to be unnecessary this time.

(I see now. He does love me and perceives Keyshia as the most beautiful. I think I am getting an idea of his taste for women. Princess Freya will probably have a hard time then? But Zenjirou does get along extremely well with Princess Bona, so it might be too early to say that she has no chance.)

Needless to say, Aura did not reveal these inner thoughts of hers to her husband.

The Queen collected herself and addressed the newsworthy information again.

"Well, anyway, Keyshia will leave the Inner Palace soon. But there is more. Some families of the relatively old waiting maids seemed to have gotten wind of Keyshia's marriage and they put in a request to have their daughters be sent back any time soon, too."

"Yeah, that makes sense from the parents' point of view."

Zenjirou nodded approvingly to her words.

The girls, who came into the Inner Palace as waiting maids, were generally all in the prime of their life. That was only natural, since they were more or less expected to become a 'concubine' for Zenjirou.

Nevertheless, the parents would not want that they wasted that golden age in its entirety inside the Inner Palace, either.

They would work as waiting maids for five years at the longest, but the life was far from over after that.

It was surely out of parental love that they wanted to take their daughters back home and marry them off before the prime of their lives ended.

Zenjirou comprehended these circumstances, so he had no reason to object.

"Sure, why not. I say they've all the right to demand that. It's not really good, when they leave all together, though. I mean, it would be a problem when a

couple of maids leave the Inner Palace all at once, right? The burden on the remaining maids would be too great.”

“Yes, I am apprehensive of that as well. Thus I am thinking of putting all the requests but Keyshia’s on hold for now and admitting more waiting maids into the Inner Palace first.

And once these new waiting maids have learned their job well enough, I will accept the retirement requests.

Lastly, I shall admit a few more waiting maids than usual in order to have some leeway with the staff, so that something like this does not happen again.”

“Yeah, sounds good. A great idea. You should definitely do that.”

On a rare occasion, Zenjirou assented to Aura numerous times with a serious expression.

He knew from experience how dangerous it was to work at the absolute limit every day. If just one person were to be absence due to sickness, when you did the daily workload with the bare minimum of staff, it meant that the workload of the remaining staff already went past their capability. Even more so, when the deadline of a job due next month was antedated to this month, because of some kind of issues. Every employee would literally see hell then.

Overwhelmed by the rare enthusiasm of her husband, the Queen just nodded.

“O-Okay. If you insist on it that much, I will do so. It should not prove to be all that difficult to get more personnel.”

There were plenty of young girls, who wanted to become waiting maids in the Inner Palace, anyway. And there were even more parents, who wanted their daughters to be one.

The young daughters from nobles were first preselected based on the loyalty towards the Royal Family. The remaining girls were then screened based on the suitableness for the tasks of a waiting maid of the Inner Palace.

The candidates that passed the final hurdle of “appearance” were the waiting maids working for Zenjirou right now.

For the last condition, they had favoured girls, who looked similar to Queen Aura, whom he fell in love with at first sight, because they had not known his preferences in the beginning.

By now, it had become apparent, though, that their efforts had been in vain. The man called Zenjirou was not the type of man, who would lay his hands on the waiting maids.

Hence there was no longer any need to pick the waiting maids based on appearance. Someone ugly would put the title “Waiting Maid of the Inner Palace” to shame, of course, but at the very least, they did not need to prioritize the tall and mature type with huge breasts like Aura anymore.

In fact, the current waiting maids requested their retirement after a year and half of work for one reason: They were already relatively old. This was self-evident. If the mature type like Aura had been preferred, then it actually required women, who already had reached a mature age.

If appearance was no longer a factor, it would be more effective to recruit younger girls as additional waiting maids. When a nineteen years old maid stayed for one year, then a fifteen years old maid would stay for five years at the longest.

“Hmm, so some of the girls will leave the Inner Palace. That’s a bit sad.

Oh, right, Aura. Would it be a problem, if I give the retiring maids a present in recognition of their services?”

The Queen pondered a bit before she answered the question her husband had suddenly thought of.

“No, it will not pose a problem per se. The nobles usually do the same with the servants in their mansion.

But if you were to give something too fancy or endow one specially, it could cause the misunderstanding that she is a ‘mistress’, so as long as you give a little something to everyone alike, it will be fine.”

“I see. A little something for everyone like. Hmm, okay, I get it. I’ll think of something.”

Zenjirou nodded recognizing a few times to the advice from Aura.

Every single waiting maid had taken care of him in the past year and a half. It must have been a stiff piece of work to take care of a man, who was ignorant about the common sense of this world and had completely different preferences than this world. Zenjirou somehow wanted to give substance to his feeling of gratitude.

“....”

“....”

As the conversation between them came to a stop for some reason, silence ensued for a while.

It was awkward to spent time with a stranger in silence, but with someone familiar, even that time was comfortable.

Zenjirou and Aura filled their glasses with iced water from a silver jug and wetted their throats that had become dry from talking so much.

Before long, Aura put the empty red Kiriko glass back onto the table and rose to speak first.

“Oh, I just remembered a different matter, so I better let you know about it, too. The souvenirs you brought back with you from Valentia, namely its white sand and clam shells, have been used to make slaked lime and its effect on the glass manufacture was outstanding.

The glass had a dark green colour little short to black so far, but it has become so much clearer now. It seems to be easier to form now, too, because it is more viscous. The glass manufacture has taken a huge leap forward.”

“Oh, that’s good news! So the sand itself was the main factor after all. We should try it with sand from all over next.”

“Of course. We will look for the sand best suited for the glass manufacture while conferring with the craftsmen. But it will happen on a small scale, since I cannot allocate all that much budget or manpower to it right now.

By the way, what about that other method? You said something about removing the iron content from the sand with a magnet or something, because

it is the reason for the discoloration, right?"

Zenjirou looked a bit troubled, when Aura inquired this, and scratched his head.

"Well, I did built an electromagnet by coiling the silver wire Prince Francesco made for me. It does require several rechargeable AA cells as a power source, but the magnet has quite the strength."

But you see, it's quite complicated to build a static magnet from it. I can definitely magnetize iron with the electromagnet by exposing it to the magnet field, but the resulting magnet is extremely weak.

To be honest, it can't be used to extract the iron content from the sand. I think I read somewhere that compounded iron has a stronger magnet field than pure iron, so I'm trying out a lot of things, but I haven't made anything useable at the moment."

He explained his progress like making excuses and naturally let his gaze wander to the corner of the room, where the experimental electromagnet and a couple of iron pieces with a very weak magnet field were lying right now.

"In other words, it is not utilizable yet?"

"Yeah and to be frank, the outlook seems rather grim. I might as well build a gadget to take the electromagnet to the facility itself for an experiment. The workers are directly subordinated to you, so secrecy shouldn't be a problem."

"Yes, I guess that is an option as well."

Crossing her arms, so that they were practically resting on top of her voluminous breasts, the Queen collected her thoughts.

"The static magnet's working, too, even if only with a fractional power. When I stuck magnetised needle onto oiled copy paper and let it swim in water, it pointed into the same direction most times. Seems like a compass works in this world."

"Kompes? What is that?"

Aura cocked her head puzzled, as the Soul of Words did not work on that vocable.

"Well, the north pole of a magnet will always face north, when you let it go, because the world is a big magnet itself. Hmm? Speaking of, this world is a sphere, too? Well, it doesn't matter right now.

Anyway, you take a thin metal needle, give it a magnetic field and let it swim on top of water for a while. The needle will naturally turn to point into a certain direction. We call a tool to determine the direction like that a 'compass'."

"Oho. That sounds really convenient for manoeuvres in an unfamiliar forest."

Aura was quite impressed, because she herself had once suffered the experience of getting lost during the previous war.

An army usually had someone with them, who could determine the direction from the stars or sun, but the sky was not always visible from within a thick forest with a lot of fauna.

The reason why she did not think of using the compass on the boat was probably that the Carpa Kingdom was not all that involved with sea travels.

"Well, it does sound problematic to hold it still while it floats on water. If it were easier to carry around, I would mass-produce and distribute it to the army in the future."

"Oh, the water's just the simplest method. A portable compass's a lot more practical.

How do I explain it? Hmm, you fixate the magnet only in the middle, like a weighing scale or balancing toy, so that it can spin around freely. It's extremely simple to build, so I'll write up a blueprint later and pass it to the craftsmen. It shouldn't be all that difficult to copy its structure."

The compass was a rather valuable invention, but Aura was currently engrossed in the glass manufacture, so it did not really drew all that much attention from her.

"Okay, I will leave it to you. Do as you please.

Anyway, back to the topic: You say we have no other option, but to lend that elektromagnet or something directly to the craftsmen in order to remove the iron content from the sand?"

"Yeah, that would be the best right now. The attracted ironsand will easily come off the electromagnet once you turn off the switch. Well, I personally think it would be better, though, if we could get our hands on some suitable sand, instead of relying on the magnet."

"You are right. I really hope that we can find the optimal sand within the royal domains, but if not, we might have to look in the other domains as well."

Oh, speaking of, I know of a place that has sand to no end."

Zenjirou guessed from the playful tone of his wife that this place would not be an option, but he asked curiously anyway.

"Which is?"

"The Twin Kingdom of Sharrow and Jilbell. Half of their territory is practically a desert. I cannot speak for the quality of the sand, but at least there is plenty of it there."

Aura mentioned the place with a smile and as expected, it was not a viable option at all.

"It may become a problem later, though. In the long run, you can't prevent technology from circulating, no matter how much effort you put into secrecy."

Well, I don't know, if the sand of a desert's suitable for the glass production, either."

Zenjirou shrugged his shoulders, but in fact, his worry was more than justified.

The sand of a desert was getting weathered over time. And while the grains of sand weathered, the containing quartz remained in the end, since it was affected by the weathering the least. That very quartz was the raw material for the glass manufacture. A highly weathered desert could even consist of quartz to more than ninety percent.

As a matter of fact, some companies on Earth even imported the weathered desert sand as a cheap raw material for the glass manufacture.

"I was joking about the Twin Kingdom, of course. For now, we will gather the sand near Valentia, since the sand from there was a great improvement."

Fortunately, Valentia and the nearby Balears Islands are royal territory. I hope we can find some good sand there."

"Yeah, good luck. I'll work on a portable electromagnet in the meantime."

The Queen nodded once to the reply from Zenjirou.

"Yes, do that.

Then let us change the topic for a bit, Zenjirou. You are still practicing magic every evening, right? If I remember correctly, you managed to activate your second spell a month ago for the first time, but how is it going now?"

Her question came out of the blue, but Zenjirou had really wanted to speak about it, too, so he answered with an energetic voice right away.

"Oh, right. I forgot to tell you. I can cast it with a seventy percent reliability now."

The wife raised an honestly impressed voice, when her husband spoke so confident.

"Oho, that is impressive. You really are a quick learner. If you like, would you show me your progress?"

Encouraged by his wife, Zenjirou clapped his hands together eagerly and presented his magic right away.

"Okay, take a good look. 'Move what I am looking at into my hands. As compensation, I make eighty-one offerings of magical power to the Space-Time Spirit'....."

"....."

He confidently chanted the spell, but unfortunately, nothing happened. The magic words had been correctly translated by the Soul of Words, so the chant itself was not the problem.

So either his perception of the spell or the offered amount of magical power had been wrong.

Zenjirou already knew that he had a less than eighty percent chance to activate the spell, so he was not all that shocked and just smiled bitterly before

challenging it for a second time.

“Oops, first one failed. Then another one. ‘Move what I am looking at into my hands. As compensation, I make eighty-one offerings of magical power to the Space-Time Spirit’.....”

“.....”

Nothing happened again.

“H-Huh? Not my day. Once more: ‘Move what I am looking at into my hands. As compensation, I make eighty-one offerings of magical power to the Space-Time Spirit’.....”

“.....”

When nothing happened for the third time in a row, even Zenjirou started to sound frantic.

“Ehm, I usually pull it off, I swear. I wonder what’s wrong?”

When her husband hastily tried to tackle the spell for the fourth time, the Queen intertwined her fingers under her chin and smiled at him to ease his nervousness.

“Do not mind it, Zenjirou. It is only natural. A magic you only acquired recently will fall through in perception with the slightest bit of nervousness already. Even more so in your case. Your second spell ever is also your first spell, where you have to regulate the output of your magical power at the same time.

Activating it on your second or fourth try would be unusual instead.”

The explanation from Aura was not consolation or anything, but just the plain truth.

Even when he usually succeeded during his training in front of his computer, the probability of success would plummet from just being watched at it. Magic was such a delicate technique.

To begin with, magic was not the only domain, where a mental strain like this would cause a lower chance of success. Even in Modern Japan, there was once a Rubik’s Cube champion, who could solve the puzzle in under five seconds at

home, but when he had to display his skills in front of a camera, he still had not solved it after one minute.

Zenjirou felt better after Aura's explanation, so he smiled back at her and scratched his head bashfully.

"Yeah, right. I'm weak to pressure after all. Sorry, Aura, I'll try until I succeed, so please give me a moment."

"Yes, do your best. I will wait as long as it takes."

After that, Zenjirou chanted the "Haul" magic numerous times while his wife watched over him.

The eleventh time finally did the trick.

"...Once more. 'Move what I am looking at into my hands. As compensation, I make eighty-one offerings of magical power to the Space-Time Spirit'. Hell yeah!"

As soon as he finished the chant, the round wooden coaster from the table immediately appeared in his right hand.

"Haul" was an extremely restricted teleport magic.

It could only pull up something inorganic that was big enough to fit into one hand and required eye contact, so it was a really inconvenient magic, but it cost the least amount of magical power amongst the Space-Time spells, so they used it for training like this.

"Yes, well done. The magic activated all right."

Completely ignoring the tough exertions so far, the Queen applauded and praised his magic.

"Haha, thanks."

Her husband made his bows while holding up the coaster in his right hand with a face red from embarrassment, whereupon the Queen suddenly said with a stern face.

"Well then, Zenjirou, I will get straight to the point: That shall be enough with the 'Haul' magic. Are you ready to get into your third magic, 'Teleport'?"

The unexpected suggestion from Aura prompted Zenjirou to show his surprise in plain view.

"Eh? I've hardly mastered 'Haul' yet, but you want me to give up on it?"

"Yes. I want you to learn a practical magic now instead of going with an easy magic, even if that somewhat contradicts the magic training."

You can more or less activate 'Haul' now. That means you managed to imagine the activated state of the magic while regulating your output of magical power to a necessary extent at the same time.

Magic has three foundations: The correct intonation, the correct perception and the correct amount of magical power.

Once you can regulate your output of magical power while keeping the correct perception in mind, like in your case, every other magic is practically the same.

So it may be a bit more demanding, but you already have grasped the basics for practicing 'Teleport'."

"I can use 'Teleport' already?"

He uttered dumbfounded, somewhat in disbelief.

So far, Zenjirou had only managed to activate two spells: "Space Isolation Barrier" and "Haul".

Both of them were "Space-Time Magic" and not something just anyone could chant, but unfortunately they were hardly useful for anything.

The ancestors of the Carpa Royal Family had pretty much stumbled across these spells in their attempts to gauge the possibilities of the "Space-Time Magic" and the spells had practically no applicability.

On the other hand, "Teleport" was the flagship as well as the most valuable spell amongst "Space-Time Magic".

The reason that the Space-Time Magic from the Carpa Royal Family was evaluated so much higher than other bloodline magic was mainly thanks to that spell.

It admittedly could only transport a single person or the practitioner himself at a time, but any distance, no matter how far, could be crossed in an instant.

When Zenjirou thought about using it himself, he could not stop a thrill of anticipation running through his body despite his age.

“Mh, okay. I’ll learn ‘Teleport’ for sure. But why so suddenly?”

Although excited for it, he wondered why Aura wanted him to learn “Teleport” against the proper sequence, so he asked this.

Aura frowned in light of that question and answered with a slight irritation.

“Yes, well, I concluded that we will face a certain problem in the near future.

Right now, we are doing... it every night, right?”

She technically did not specify what they were doing, but seeing as she blushes on the words “every night”, it could only mean one thing.

“Hmm, yeah. Same goes for tonight, right?”

Zenjirou also flushed his cheek in line with Aura and answered with a teasing tone in order to hide his embarrassment.

“N-No need to spell it out! Anyway, it will only be a matter of time until we make a second child at this rate.

That, however, will be a little bit of a problem time-wise. This is just my personal opinion, but I believe it will take at least one more year until Princess Freya will become your concubine.

The Intercontinental Trade Agreement is indispensable to her acceptance as a concubine, since I have no intention to receive her without it.

Because of this, Princess Freya will have to go back to the Uppsala Kingdom at least once in order to get the approval on the trade agreement and the marriage from the king.

They say the ‘Yellow Leaves’ took one-hundred and twenty days to get here from the Uppsala Kingdom. It may not take them as long now, because they know the route a bit better, but a one-way trip should still take about a hundred days.

So the journey back and forth would be two hundred days alone already. If you add the time for negotiations here and there to it, my one year estimate is actually quite optimistic.”

“I see. And?”

At this point, Zenjirou still did not understand what Aura was worrying about. The Queen continued her explanation to her husband, who was casually giving her a look of inquiry.

“Do you not remember the mess, when I was pregnant with Carlos? Our nobility was really keen on having you take a concubine back then.

That will just repeat itself, when I get pregnant with our second child. If Princess Freya were your concubine by then, we could put them off by saying you already have a concubine, but like I just explained to you, she will most likely be nothing but a ‘possible candidate’ at this point in time.”

Realizing what Aura was getting at, Zenjirou immediately lost all colour in his face.

“B-But we fended them off before, right? So if we just...”

“We did so by claiming that you have no interest in other woman. But that excuse will not work this time, because there is a potential concubine in front of Princess Freya now.”

“Oh shit, I’d forgotten.”

This time, Zenjirou literally threw his hands up in horror.

“Princess Freya by herself is already too much for me, but another one on top of it now? And before Princess Freya at that? Nope, no way.”

The Queen soothed her whining husband.

“You are going to learn ‘Teleport’ for that very reason. I want you to learn ‘Teleport’ before I give birth, so that you can bring over a healer from the Twin Kingdom.”

“Oh, right.”

After she pointed it out like that, Zenjirou corrected his agitated sitting

posture.

He was going to learn Teleport before his wife gave birth to their next child, so that he could bring a healer to help with the delivery. That itself sounded quite admirable, but Zenjirou could only think of himself as a good-for-nothing, who was all talk, because he had already started the endeavours to make a child without learning the Teleport magic yet.

Whether Aura knew about the inner unrest of her husband or not, she continued with a stern expression anyway.

"Hence you will have a legit reason to go to the Twin Kingdom of Sharow and Jilbell, provided that you manage to learn 'Teleport'.

And then we will be able to avoid the concubine requests from the nobles. After all, the matter of a concubine is yours to decide, at least on paper. I may be the Queen of the castle, but the matter will come to a halt as long as I say that we cannot proceed while you are absent."

As a matter of fact, even the matter with Princess Freya was ultimately announced in such a way that "Zenjirou chose her as his partner".

Hence the idea from Aura to have Zenjirou leave the country in order to block the concubine requests from the nobility was a legit one.

But it did not brighten Zenjirou's mood. On the contrary, it made it worse.

"Sure, I can escape our nobility for the time being like that, but the Twin Kingdom, or rather the Sharow Royal Family wants to push a concubine onto me, too, right? In the worst case, I may end up with three concubines instead?"

"But if everything goes well, Princess Freya will be the only one.

Besides, you can just tell the Twin Kingdom that a concubine is traditionally taken from your local nobility and you would evoke the hostility in them if you were to take another concubine from a different country, since you already have a potential concubine from a foreign country."

"Oh god, what a farce."

Zenjirou could not help but give his wife a weary look.

In fact, the suggestion from Aura was quite ridiculous.

By going to the Twin Kingdom, they stalled their own nobility, whereas the Twin Kingdom was also stalled with the reason that their own nobility came first.

"I would be done for, though, if the nobility and the Sharrow Royal Family of the Twin Kingdom conspire against me. With no way out, a second and third concubine are practically inevitable."

Aura recognized from his look with half-opened eyes that her husband was not really keen on the idea, so she cocked her head a bit troubled.

"You do have a point, but what will you do then? Give up on it? Let me tell you, though, that everything will play out like I have told you earlier, if I get pregnant before Princess Freya has become your official concubine."

"Well... I would rather not to, but maybe we should put the sex on hold for a while?"

"At this point of time? We have been doing it for more than ten days already, so it might already be too late. Besides, it is definitely better for the Royal Family to have a second child before accepting a concubine. I personally want to continue as we have."

"Hmm, I see."

Zenjirou slumped into the couch and mused for a while.

"....."

He had never been the smartest one and his brain had to process a lot of new information all at once, so it could not keep up.

Zenjirou was thinking.

Everything turned out to be no good, when he tried to get the best outcome at all costs.

He ought to make a priority list and start to clear them from top to down, giving up on the low priority entries, if they were not feasible at this point.

His train of thought was based on that now.

(What's the most important to me? Easy: Aura. Another child with her is set in

stone, too, so it's inevitable that I learn "Teleport" and go to the Twin Kingdom.)

Reaching such a conclusion, Zenjirou crossed the first thing off the list.

Considering the childbirth, not going to the Twin Kingdom was not an option. In that case, it was only natural that he would face the matter of a concubine in the Twin Kingdom in the future.

According to these preconditions, Aura's suggestion was not all that bad after all.

If it could not be avoided anyway, he might as well learn "Teleport" earlier in order to escape the concubine talks of the nobility at least. An effective scheme for sure.

"Okay. For now, I'll try to learn 'Teleport' as quickly as possible, so that I can immediately go to the Twin Kingdom once you are pregnant. I agree with you up to that point."

"Oh, I see."

Aura smiled happily, whereupon Zenjirou smiled back, too, albeit a bit tired.

"Considering your well-being, it's absolutely necessary that I can travel between the Twin Kingdom and Carpa Kingdom with 'Teleport'. There's no doubt about that.

And if that causes new problems, so be it. I'm ready to submit to almost anything for the sake of bringing a healer to your delivery."

"Yes, thank you."

The Queen could feel a warm throbbing in her chest in regards to the passionate confession of her husband.

Her husband was saying that he was willing to endure any hardships for the sake of her and their child's health. Nothing could make a woman more happy.

It was a bit ironic, though, that these very hardships could cause him to accept a concubine, in other words: wedding another woman.

Zenjirou regained the composure he had lost during their conversation and

looked his beloved wife straight into the eyes.

"It's no use thinking too far ahead with my brains, so I'll just keep it simple for now.

I'll learn 'Teleport'. I'll go to the Twin Kingdom. But I won't take a concubine from anywhere.

I shall give in, when it's inevitable due to political issues, like with Princess Freya, but if possible, I won't accept it."

His phrasing somehow sounded like he had already accepted Princess Freya as a concubine to Aura, but there was no merit in pointing that out now. It would just trouble her amiable husband.

"Yes, by all means. Thank you, Zenjirou."

So she just smiled and thanked her husband for his devotion from the bottom of her heart.

Epilogue: Heading for the March of Guzzle

A few days later.

With all the preparations done, Zenjirou was ready to leave the Royal Capital. His destination was Guzzle City, the main town in the March of Guzzle.

There he was going to attend the marriage ceremony between Puyol Guillén, the current head of the Guillén Family, and Lucinda Guzzle, the eldest daughter of the Guzzle Family, as a representative of Queen Aura.

"Well then, I leave the rest in your hands, Zenjirou. Do a proper job in congratulating the newlyweds in my stead, since I cannot attend."

"Yes, you can count on me, Your Majesty. I shall do my utmost to complete the task to your full satisfaction."

In the audience room of the Royal Palace, Queen Aura sat on her throne while she had a formal exchange with her Prince Consort Zenjirou, standing beneath the throne, under the watchful eyes of a couple of nobles.

Needless to say, they had bidden the true farewell to each other in the Inner Palace this morning.

Along with a passionate embrace, a kiss and warm wishes.

Before that, they had spent a lovely time together with their beloved child Carlos Zenkichi.

So the current situation was nothing but a formal rite.

"Have a safe trip, Master Zenjirou!"

Zenjirou turned his back on the throne and left the audience room mannerly, paying attention to his step length and speed, while the civil servants saw him off with loud voices.

Flanked by guards on all sides, Zenjirou left the Royal Palace and headed to the huge carriage drawn by eight dragons standing in the forecourt. Before the carriage awaited him the Crown Princess of the Uppsala Kingdom and her bodyguard.

"I will be in your care, Your Majesty Zenjirou. I hope we have a pleasant travel together."

Before he had time to admire the huge carriage he was seeing for the first time, Princess Freya bowed before him so that her short silver hair fluttered.

"Oh, Princess Freya. Yes, I will be in your care as well."

Zenjirou shifted his gaze from the carriage to the silver-haired girl and answered fairly like that.

The clothes of Princess Freya were a bit of a surprise. In the Royal Palace, she had always worn a white or light blue dress, but now, she was clad in thick trousers and a long-sleeved shirt with some kind of leather vest pulled over it.

These clothes were outfitted with a lot of large pockets for convenience rather than fashion. The final touch was the weapon holster attached to her thick leather belt and the object holstered in it could be called a "hatchet"?

Only the fluffy muffler around her neck and the sapphire broach holding it together were indicative of fashion for women.

Maybe she had expected a march by foot instead of a trip by carriage? At the very least, her clothes gave off that impression, if she were to shoulder a large backpack, at that.

Zenjirou himself was also wearing a decorative bronze sword at his waist, but otherwise he had put on the traditional attire of the Carpa Kingdom like always, so the contrast to Princess Freya was even more obvious.

Princess Freya had probably sensed his gaze on her.

"Oh, I had heard that it will be a long travel overland, so I chose clothes that are easier to move in instead. If it is a bother, I can go change them right away, though."

The silver-haired princess said this to Zenjirou with an upturned look and waited for his reaction.

"....."

However, it was more than likely that she was just making up an excuse for her "preference" in clothes, considering the hint of "dissatisfaction" showing

through the inexpressive mask of Skathi, the blonde female warrior standing at attention behind her.

Either way, Zenjirou did not really have a reason to object.

"No, that will not be necessary. It suits you well."

"Thank you very much. I knew you would say that."

Princess Freya smiled happily and lowered her head once more.

Zenjirou then boarded the prepared dragon carriage. Drawn by eight dragons, the carriage was admittedly huge, but its width was more or less limited, since it had to be able to pass through the streets.

Hence, the interior had a tall ceiling and enough space lengthwise, but was not all that wide. A group of five was currently sitting on the seats inside.

The centre seat facing the front of the carriage obviously belonged to the owner of the carriage, namely Zenjirou. Next to him sat Princess Freya, his partner for the upcoming marriage ceremony.

The remaining three people were sitting across them, facing the back of the carriage.

Across from Princess Freya sat her bodyguard and trusted retainer: The female warrior Victoria Kronkvist also known as Skathi.

Across from Zenjirou sat his personal knight: Natalio Maldonado.

And slightly away from him sat waiting maid Ines, the caretaker for Zenjirou dispatched from the Inner Palace.

The way to the March of Guzze was not necessarily hazard-free, so the bodyguards Skathi and Knight Natalio had taken their short spear and sword with them into the carriage.

Normally, it was unthinkable that a person riding in the same carriage as Prince Consort Zenjirou would be allowed to be armed, but Skathi was the trusted retainer of Princess Freya, who in turn was a possible concubine for Zenjirou.

And considering that Skathi was the only bodyguard for Princess Freya here,

she had been given special permission this once to arm herself.

Before long, the dragon carriage slowly started to move. As expected of the driver of a royal carriage, the ride went extremely smoothly.

The level of civilization in the Carpa Kingdom was not advanced enough for suspension systems, so even the fanciest dragon carriage would still bump all the same, but fortunately enough, the roads within the Royal Capital were all evenly paved.

The seat cushions were exquisite, too, so Zenjirou was not feeling any discomfort so far. Although problems would probably arise once they left the Capital and hit the raw dirt surface of the “Salt Road”.

In the meantime, the carriage went through the gate of the Royal Palace into the downtown of the Capital.

“Ohh...”

Despite his age, Zenjirou raised a small voice in excitement, when he saw the scenery beyond the opened windows.

It was only the second time he saw the town with his own eyes. The first occasion had been the parade on his own wedding.

Needless to say, Zenjirou have had his hands full with not screwing up the wedding ceremony back then. The best he could manage was to wave his hand like a machine while forcing a smile.

So in a manner of speaking, he was taking a proper look at the city for the first time now.

(The city's bigger and more organised than I thought. Way bigger than Valentia.)

He curiously looked out of the window at the stone paved street and row of houses.

The main street was closed off, since royalty was passing through, but it was not for some kind of event this time, so the dragon carriage moved at a steady speed through the Capital without halt.

Nevertheless, a huge carriage drawn by eight dragons and decorated with

gold and silver still drew the attention from the citizens with just that.

Curious onlookers gathered on both sides of the road and talked to each other animated while pointing at the carriage.

And children ran after the carriage on the sidewalk with all their might.

(Heh, kids are the same everywhere.)

Zenjirou naturally smiled at this heart-warming scene.

Quiet up till now, Princess Freya suddenly raised a puzzled voice, when she saw that.

"Did you spot something interesting, Your Majesty Zenjirou?"

She probably just needed a reason to start a conversation.

Zenjirou answered her honestly, albeit with a wry smile, since he did not want to be on bad terms with the girl, whom he was going to travel with for numerous days.

"Oh, excuse me. It was not something interesting in particular. The unusual sight just happened to pique my interest."

Princess Freya was surprised at his reply.

"Your Majesty, could it be that you have not seen the city before?"

"Well, strictly speaking, I have been here before, but yes, I am effectively seeing it for the first time now."

"Oh my, what can I say..."

His answer made Princess Freya be at loss for words.

Even though he was living in the palace of the Capital, he had not seen the city itself till this day.

It seemed Zenjirou was actually the sheltered princess of the Inner Palace amongst the two of them.

He realized it would be bad if she were to misunderstand that Queen Aura was shutting him away, so he added with a smile.

"There had been plenty of opportunities, but I am a homebody by nature, so I

let these opportunities slide until today.

Do you spend a lot of time outside, Princess Freya?"

The topic change was pushed through quite a bit, but her conversation partner was finally picking up the pace, so she had no reason to turn it down.

With that in mind, Princess Freya smiled as she replied.

"Yes. I am ashamed to admit this, but I have always been a kind of tomboy. I splashed around in the river, ran about the place, hunted foxes or engaged in some white water rafting. My father and mother often scolded me for it."

"I see. Then I guess our slightly long travel will be no problem for you."

"Yes. No problem at all. I may not look like it, but I actually have ridden a longboat against the stream of a river for numerous day before... I even lead a hunting party once."

"Oh, that is impressive."

"Well, I did manage to hunt foxes or rabbits, but I have never chased a dragon before. I would definitely like to challenge myself to such a hunt, if the opportunity arises along the way."

This seemed to be no joke as Princess Freya patted the hatchet at her waist with an eager glint in her eyes.

"Hahaha, please allow me to accompany you then. That being said, I would only be a hindrance and no help in the hunt, so I will have my Knight Natalio here do his best in my stead.

I am counting on you, Natalio."

Suddenly addressed like that, Knight Natalio Maldonado gave a jerk, but immediately put his clenched right hand against his left shoulder and declared.

"Of course, Sire. I shall do my utmost with the Dragon Bow you have bestowed onto me."

While they were having this conversation, the dragon carriage left the Royal Capital and closed in on the Salt Road.

The scenery outside the window changed from wooden or stone houses to a

ridiculous wide plain and a forest in the distance.

“Master Zenjirou, the ride will become a bit rougher now, so please bear it in mind. We can halt the carriage at any moment, if you should feel sick, so please just speak up, when you need to rest.”

“Okay. Ines.”

Zenjirou replied with a smile to Ines, who had called out to him in consideration.

(Oh right. We’re going to use remote roads until we reach the March of Guzzle. This really feels like a trip now.)

With the intense smell of greenery coming in through the opened windows, Zenjirou realized that they had moved on from the populated area of mankind.

Although they were travelling through the middle of nowhere, the carriage of Zenjirou was attended by several hundred soldiers at the front and back and the other nobles travelling with him were also accompanied by their own guards.

So they were not exposed to danger unless something unprecedented took place.

(Well, I can do without trouble. I want to arrive in one piece.)

Aware of these circumstances, Zenjirou maintained his sight-seeing mood and calmly enjoyed the passing scenery from his window.

Extra Stories about the Waiting Maids and their Master: Changes in the Staff

Ten days had passed since Zenjirou, the master of the Inner Palace, had left for his journey to the March of Guzzle.

Two waiting maids were called by Supervisory Maid Amanda, the woman in charge of the Inner Palace, and thus visited her office.

If Fay, Dolores and Rethé, also known under the nickname “Three Troublemakers”, were to be called into her office, they would start to tremble in fear from just that and desperately try to come up with an apology for whatever mischief they had been associated with this time.

But the two waiting maids, who had been sent for now, had a clean slate and knocked on the door of the office with composure without pressing the panic button.

“I, Conchita, have come to answer your summon, Mrs. Amanda.”

“So have I, Sabrina.”

“Come in.”

With the prompt of the supervisory maid, the two waiting maids pushed the door to her office open with a polite “excuse us” and entered.

The duties of the supervisory maid also entailed the task to call upon a waiting maid for an individual lecture like this time. Because of that, the private room of the supervisory maid came with an extra office room, albeit a small one.

Within that small office, the two young waiting maids Conchita and Sabrina faced Supervisory Maid Amanda.

Supervisory Maid Amanda sat on a simple wooden chair behind a small round table and looked the two maids sitting across from her into the eyes as she came straight down to business.

"You two share a room with Keyshia, so I am sure you can already guess what this is about, but I called you here today to inform you about it.

Conchita, Sabrina, your families have put in a request to send you back home. Your Master Zenjirou has granted that request.

Hence you two will soon retire as waiting maids of the Inner Palace and return to your families."

Like she had expected, Conchita and Sabrina showed no surprise to her explanation and simply nodded in acknowledgment.

In fact, they had guessed what this was about as soon as they had been called for.

As a fellow of the same work group and their roommate, Keyshia had told Conchita and Sabrina half a month ago that she was retiring as a waiting maid, because her marriage had been arranged.

Of course the two had been surprised at first, when they heard about it, but immediately got their heads around it.

Keyshia turned twenty this year, the same age as Conchita and Sabrina.

As a general rule, that age was considered the last year of the marriageable age and hence called the "crunch year". Keyshia and the other girls were "waiting maids of the Inner Palace", so that period could be prolonged for another two or three years, but the earlier the matter was settled, the better.

And considering they were the same age as Keyshia, the same applied to Conchita and Sabrina, too.

Even if it was impossible to have them marry into a richer family such as the Márquez Family like Keyshia did, the families of Conchita and Sabrina were naturally working towards their marriage.

Considering that they were aware of these circumstances, it definitely came to no surprise to them that their parents requested their return now. If anything, they bowed to the inevitable.

"Yes, very well."

Conchita lowered her head so that her thick black hair dangled in the air.

"Thank you very much for your guidance up till today, Mrs. Amanda."

Sabrina, too, lowered her head so that her beautiful red hair slid away smoothly.

Supervisory Maid Amanda unconsciously frowned a bit in light of their answers.

Be it their work habits or general attitude, the two of them, along with Keyshia, who had already left the Inner Palace, had been the most reliable maids.

They were quite capable of chores, had a mature mindset and backbone, making them self-assured in appearance and manner.

The younger "Three Troublemakers" did surpass them in the audacity category, but it would be unfair to Keyshia and the others to compare them with each other, just like having a polar bear contest for cold endurance.

Anyway, the three senior waiting maids had been excellent subordinates in terms of capability as well as personality and never caused any trouble.

But Supervisory Maid Amanda threw cold water on the hopes of these two maids to retire immediately.

"You two will leave the Inner Palace and go home. That much has already been decided, but it will not be any time soon, because we would end up being short-handed in the Inner Palace otherwise."

Fortunately for us, if not necessarily for you, you two are not in a hurry to retire for a marriage like Keyshia.

Hence we will admit new maids into the Inner Palace first. Once the newcomers have been trained enough to be part of the effective workforce, you will be allowed to retire. Any objections?"

"None, Mrs. Amanda."

"Not at all."

Confronted like that, the two waiting maids both answered in a calm manner.

Supervisory Maid Amanda nodded satisfied in light of the replies from the

talented waiting maids while heaving a sigh at heart.

(Why do the good ones have to leave early while the troublemakers stay? I am supposed to be in the Inner Palace, where only the best of the best gather.)

Her position as the supervisory maid did not allow her to voice these complaints, though.

“Good.”

Keeping her expression under control, Supervisory Maid Amanda then nodded briefly and further explained the circumstances to the prospectively retiring waiting maids.

“Three new girls will be coming here in a few days. Each of them will be paired with you and the other waiting maids in a group of three to learn the ropes.”

In other words, she was saying that they would be working in a team consisting of one “new waiting maid”, one “retiring waiting maid” and one “remaining waiting maid”.

Because Conchita and Sabrina were currently the only retiring maids for now, the last group was going to have two remaining waiting maids.

This allocation was made to prevent a falling-out after Conchita and Sabrina retired, which could happen if they were to teach the newcomers all by themselves.

The Inner Palace was a secluded space. They could not afford to let the new waiting maids become isolated.

“Master Zenjirou is currently away, so this is a good time. There is less work to do in the Inner Palace now, so we are going to take the opportunity and teach the new girls everything they need to know.”

A training period of new staff usually meant less manpower for a while, unless the new staff was extremely quick on the uptake.

After all, the newcomers would generally be of no help at first and the senior maids would get less work done, because they spent time on teaching the newcomers.

So now it was the perfect time to admit new staff, since there was overall less work to do.

"We are going to admit only three new girls for now to keep things in moderation, but as soon as they conclude their training, we will admit another three girls. And I plan to have at least six or, better still, ten to twelve girls trained, so consider yourself busy until then. Understood?"

"Yes, Mrs. Amanda."

"Loud and clear."

If it had applied to the Three Troublemakers, they might not have said it out loud, but their expression or attitude would have surely revealed their displeasure. Not the well-mannered Conchita and Sabrina, however. They did not even bat an eye.

It proved how adept they were at reading the mood, because they usually assumed an appropriate lax attitude, when dealing with the cooking department head Vanessa, since she preferred that despite her strict appearance.

"Very well. Now then, I have a little something from Master Zenjirou for you in recognition of your efforts till now.

Master Zenjirou actually wanted to give it to you directly, like with Keyshia, but depending on the circumstances, you two might end up leaving the Inner Palace before he returns.

Hence, I will give it to you now, but if Master Zenjirou does return in time, make sure to thank him for it in person. Are we clear?"

While pointing that out to them, Supervisory Maid Amanda placed a rectangle wooden box each in front of Conchita and Sabrina.

"Go ahead and open it."

Urged like that, the two waiting maids looked at each other, then took their wooden boxes from the table into their hands and opened the lid.

"This is...?"

"A silver chain? No, a bracelet?

Like Sabrina had said, it was a silver bracelet. It had a relative plain design, but of high quality. Nevertheless, one of them was not really worth a fortune.

A closer look, however, revealed one sparkling transparent sphere worked into the silver chain: A glass bead from Zenjirou's private collection.

It was made out of simple coloured glass, so a person from Modern Earth would attach more value to the silver chain itself. And to be honest, not even the aesthetic sense of this world gave it much credit.

But Zenjirou did not chose the beads for their beautiful or ugly appearance, nor for its monetary value.

He chose it for its aspect of being extremely hard to counterfeit right now.

The two waiting maids carefully took the silver chain bracelet out of the red padded box and touched it with their fingers, whereupon Supervisory Maid Amanda spoke up.

"This belongs to you now. Master Zenjirou asked to have it back in case you do not like it, though."

"Unthinkable!"

"We could never do something that disrespectful!"

Supervisory Maid Amanda ignored them as they turned pale and continued.

"The only condition is that you return it in person then. He will not accept any other method. His exact words were: 'If they want to give it back, they have to return it to me in person, no matter what.'"

Conchita and Sabrina pondered for a while, bewildered by the relayed message from Zenjirou.

As noble daughters, they were not stupid by nature, so it did not take them all that long to realize the "real value" of the bracelet.

In other words, that bracelet allowed them to receive one audience with Zenjirou in the future under the pretext of returning it. Keyshia, who had left the Inner Palace before them, surely had gotten the same thing.

This went beyond a simple accessory. It was a once-in-a-lifetime ticket to

meet the Prince Consort Zenjirou.

Supervisory Maid Amanda read in their faces that they had correctly understood the true value of the bracelet, so she said with an instructive tone.

"As you may know, Master Zenjirou is not an advocate of iniquity. Therefore he will not give your family or family-in-law any special treatment, just because you have been a maid of the Inner Palace."

On the contrary however, I am sure that he will lend you a hand, if your family or family-in-law gets involved with some kind of trouble or suffers from obvious injustice."

The meaning behind her words was deep.

To put it briefly, Higher Society abided by survival of the fittest.

Of course all nobility fundamentally obeyed the Carpa Royal Family, the driving force of that system, but in reality, its influence did not reach every nook and corner.

Accordingly, the majority of quarrels and disputes between nobility were settled without ever getting the attention of the royal family.

Needless to say, these disputes were often not settled through "rightful arguments", but rather through "superior influence".

A bracelet like this was extremely valuable in this kind of Higher Society.

It could only be utilized once, so it proved difficult to actually use it, but it still worked as a deterrent towards opposing nobility, when you had a "trump card to skip all the formalities and appeal directly to royalty anytime" in petto.

"Thank you very much."

"I will treasure it."

Deeply moved, Conchita and Sabrina tightly squeezed the bracelets.

"I will work my hardest to repay at least a share of this favour before I leave the Inner Palace.

Speaking of, Mrs. Amanda, you said Conchita and I would be paired with another waiting maid to train the new girl, but have you already decided on

whom I will work with?"

With her brown eyes wet from emotions, Sabrina asked the supervisory maid what she suddenly thought of, with a cheerful voice.

She curiously waited for her answer and Conchita followed suit.

Although she felt a bit pressured by their gazes, Supervisory Maid Amanda did not avert her eyes, faced the pressure and replied after she cleared her throat with a cough.

"Yes, I have. Conchita, you will work with Fay, Sabrina, you will work with Dolores to train the new girls."

"With Fay?"

"With Dolores?"

It goes without saying that she meant Fay and Dolores from the Three Troublemakers group.

Upon hearing these names, Conchita and Sabrina screwed up their faces beyond recognition.

*

An early morning several days later.

The waiting maids gathered in a certain room of the Inner Palace like always and noticed three unfamiliar young waiting maids standing near Supervisory Maid Amanda.

None of them were so undisciplined to start whispering secretly about them now, but they did give the young maids a curious look.

Sitting ducks for the looks of their seniors, the three newcomers slightly shuddered from nervousness next to Supervisory Maid Amanda.

In order to relieve them of their nervousness, Supervisory Maid Amanda softly patted them on the back and started to address the assembled maids of the Inner Palace with her usual strict tone.

"It has been decided that some of us will leave the Inner Palace in the course of the year. You might have already heard rumours about it, since one of them

has already left.

Accordingly, we are welcoming new waiting maids into the Inner Palace today. Girls, introduce yourselves."

With these words, Supervisory Maid Amanda lightly slapped the back of the petite waiting maid standing on her right.

The slapped waiting maid practically jumped up with a jerk and started her self-introduction with a faltering voice.

"M-My name is Manola Sa... Oops. I mean, I am Manola! I know that I have much to learn, but please treat me kindly."

Due to her nervousness, the girl named Manola almost mentioned her family name, but stopped at the last moment and somehow finished her self-introduction without a hitch, never minding her stuttering.

Those working as waiting maids were essentially servants, so they did not use their family name. Otherwise it would cause all kind of trouble. And this was not limited to the Inner Palace.

For example, if a young waiting maid came from a more well-off family than Supervisory Maid Amanda, it hardly needed mentioning that the chain of command would be compromised, when both of them were aware of each other's family name.

In practice, though, Higher Society was rather close-knit. Even if you did not especially mention your family, people knew what family you were from most of the times, so this was nothing but a false front.

Consequently, the high-ranking waiting maids like the supervisory maid were usually picked from relatively renowned family to avoid problems later on.

Even amongst the department heads of the Inner Palace, Ines was the only exception as the cleaning department head.

As soon as Manola duly finished her self-introduction, Supervisory Maid slapped the back of the waiting maid of average height and build with her left hand next.

"I am a waiting maid of the Inner Palace from today on as well. My name is

Milagros. I look forward to your guidance and support.”

Maybe she was more positive about it after hearing the tense greeting from her fellow newcomer, but her self-introduction went a lot smoother.

Having said this, the waiting maid called Milagros had rather narrow eyes, so it was difficult to read her expression. She might as well be as nervous as Manola at heart for all we knew.

With two self-introduction out of the way, the last waiting maid could grasp the timing for hers, even without a cue.

Standing next to Milagros, the only waiting maid out of the reach for Supervisory Maid Amanda ,started her self-introduction.

“My name is Mónica. I have been given the honour to serve Master Zenjirou with you from today on. Pleased to make your acquaintance.”

After a short pause, Supervisory Maid Amanda looked at all the young waiting maids and began to speak.

“The three of them will ultimately work together in a team of three, like everyone else, but for now, I will have each of them form a temporary group with you, so that they can learn their job as quickly as possible.

When you are paired with them, remember that you are their seniors and properly teach them the ropes. Am I understood?”

The announcement came as a surprise to everyone but Conchita and Sabrina, since they had heard about it beforehand, but the waiting maids had no right to defy Supervisory Maid Amanda anyway.

“Yes, Mrs. Amanda.”

The young waiting maids answered in unison, whereupon the supervisory maid nodded with her stern expression and pronounced the group allocation.

“I will announce the groups now.

Manola is paired with Sabrina and Fay.

Milagros is paired with Conchita and Dolores.

Mónica is paired with Karina and Christel.

Rethe and Kate will be on their own, but you two will be in charge of the kitchen.

Regardless of your assignment, everyone is to lead the newcomers properly. Are we clear?"

This was the first time the teams changed, ever since the young waiting maids had entered the Inner Palace, so except the informed duo, everyone showed bewilderment.

Nevertheless, Amanda had the absolute power of decision over the personnel as the supervisory maid.

"Yes, Ma'am."

In the end, the waiting maids had no choice but to reply like that.

*

Together with the newbie Milagros and the soon-to-be retiring Conchita, Dolores was assigned to cleaning duty today, so she headed down the hallway towards the living room while calling out to the new waiting maid walking next to her.

"Let me introduce myself, too. I'm Dolores. Can I call you Milagros?"

In order to face Dolores, who was about one hundred and eighty centimetre tall, Milagros had to look up, because she only had an average height.

"Yes, Milagros is fine, Miss Dolores. Please take care of me today."

Milagros looked obliquely upward to her right in order to face Dolores, but since she had extremely narrow eyes, it did not really feel like eye contact to Dolores.

"Then me, too. I am Conchita. You are here to replace me, so we will not be working together for long, but nice to meet you, Milagros."

Walking on her left, Conchita also named herself with a warm smile.

Although not as tall as Dolores, Conchita, too, was one of the taller girls. Her height measured around one hundred and seventy centimetre, so Milagros did not have as much trouble to face her as before.

"Likewise, pleased to meet you, Miss Conchita. Oh, are you going to get married, considering that you will be retiring?"

As expected, young girls loved to talk about love and marriage. Milagros looked obvious interested, whereupon Conchita fessed up with a faint smile.

"Yes. The marriage itself will probably not be any time soon, but my father was getting a bit impatient. It seems he found a good match for me."

You are in the same position as me now, so you better resign yourself to that fate, too."

Not quite understanding the meaning of Conchita's advice, Milagros wrinkled the brows of her narrow eyes and cocked her head puzzled.

"Resign, you say?"

"Indeed. Working as a waiting maid in the Inner Palace gives you a lot of status. For better or worse, families you never even dreamed of will propose a marriage to you."

You see, we currently have no royalty outside the Inner Palace, so any person with a connection to the Inner Palace seems to has far better chances now."

Conchita said with a shrug of her shoulders.

Her family was low-ranking nobility without a title or territory.

Normally she would marry into the family of another low-ranking nobility. It would already be a "Cinderella Story" if she managed to marry into the family of a simple feudal lord. Her family was that low-ranking.

But despite that, Conchita had gotten several proposals from successors of feudal lords and titled nobility. The biggest surprise was that amongst them was one from the famous and prominent Guillén Family.

Her father figured that it would be too much for their family, so he quickly asked his old friend, a knight, to claim that it had been an official engagement, when they had "promised their children to each other" drunken in the past, nipping the other offers for his daughter in the bud early.

Marrying into a powerful family sounded all good, but when their statuses were too different, it was quite likely that the inferior family would be

swallowed whole by the superior family in the not so distant future.

"Well, you still do not have to worry about that for now. Coping with your duties in the Inner Palace comes first."

"Yes. I will do my best."

Conchita smiled reassuringly, whereat Milagros gave her a big smile back so that her narrow eyes looked like an arc now.

While they were talking like that, the three of them reached the living room.

As the vanguard, Dolores grasped the doorknob and looked over her shoulder at Milagros.

"There will be many unfamiliar things inside. We'll explain how you have to handle them, so please don't touch anything before that."

"Yes, I understand."

Only after Milagros signalized her understanding with a nod, Dolores slowly opened the door to the living room.

"Oh, wow..."

Inside the living room, Milagros widened her narrow eyes at the strange sight.

With all the personal stuff from Zenjirou in it, the living room certainly was a wondrous sight to behold.

Several LED floor lamps stood around two couches facing each other.

The five-door refrigerator stood in one corner, emitting a faint weird noise.

A large liquid-crystal TV throned on a waist-high pedestal.

The computer stood conspicuously on the desk in another corner of the room with the multifunction printer set up next to it.

All of these were things an average person of this world had never seen before.

With a closer look, the LED floor lamp could get identified as a kind of light source, since its build was similar to a candle holder, and the refrigerator could be taken for a cupboard or something, even if you did not know about its

“cooling” function.

But the TV, computer and printer completely went beyond her imaginative power. If anything, she might mistake the TV and computer for an “opaque mirror”.

“You never saw anything like this before, right? We’re generally forbidden to wipe them with a wet cloth. There is a lot to consider, so I’ll show an example today. Just learn by watching for now, Milagros.”

“Okay, I will.”

The new waiting maid obediently assented to the instructions from Dolores.

Conchita then added further instructions with a soft tone.

“How about we let you do the cleaning of anything else? Milagros, you know how to do normal cleaning, right?”

“Yes, I can do that. If I had not made it into the Inner Palace, I would have served elsewhere, so I had memorized the standard tasks for a waiting maid already.”

The newbie with the narrow eyes displayed even more confidence in her expression than in her utterance.

Judging by that, Milagros must have been from a low-ranking noble family.

The daughters of middle-ranking noble families or above could serve royalty as waiting maids in the Royal Palace or Inner Palace, but they would not serve in the mansion of another nobility.

Of course there were exceptions even amongst high-ranking nobility, like the Guillén Family sending its little sister to another family for learning etiquette, so it was hardly an universal rule.

“Then allow me to start.”

Saying this, Milagros immediately reached out for the cleaning tools and began to clean the living room.

Even if the electronic appliances were off-limits, she could brush the dust off the shelves, wipe the couches or mop the floor.

In accordance with her self-confident assertion, she was working quite dexterously.

Considering that it was her first day in the Inner Palace, she concentrated quite a bit on cleaning extra thoroughly. It was done perfectly from a neatness point of view.

But seeing her clean that carefully, Dolores intervened right away.

"Milagros, you're taking too long. Right now, we can take our time, because Master Zenjirou is absent, but usually, we're fighting a battle against the clock."

Cautioned liked that, Milagros stopped her hand from wiping the couch and answered confused.

"M-My apologies. But I am already working at my fastest."

A part of her apology was also an excuse, so Dolores gave her a bad advice with a nonchalant look.

"Then focus on the dust or stains within sight alone. The goal is to finish on time, not doing it perfectly."

"Hold it, Dolores. Why are you suddenly teaching the rookie to skimp the work!?"

Conchita glared at the member of the Three Troublemakers less than thrilled, but also smiled wryly, because Dolores was technically right about it, even if it was not something she ought to teach the newcomers right away.

Keeping her wry smile, Conchita explained it to the new waiting maid with slitted eyes.

"Well, Dolores does have a point, though. Master Zenjirou usually spends all his time in the living room, except for meals and baths, so we have to clean the living room as fast as possible above all."

"But we get scolded, if we are negligent in our work, or not?"

Milagros expressed her concern a bit anxious. Her argument would hold true if applied to the common sense of this world, but with Zenjirou as their Master here, it was completely invalid.

"Principally, Master Zenjirou does not scold us, because he loathes a tense situation above all. Well, you probably will only understand it once you have met him yourself.

Anyway, Master Zenjirou does get uncomfortable, when he is near people, who work that high-strung, so try to relax a bit more."

The advice from Conchita was actually spot-on, but it made no sense to anyone, who did not know about Zenjirou's personality.

So Milagros only took the part of the advice she understood to heart and muttered it to herself to commit it to memory.

"Ehm, I need to hurry, because there is not much time allocated to cleaning the living room, but Master Zenjirou dislikes to be around uptight people, so I can not let my tension show.

...Sorry, I might not be able to measure up to a waiting maid of the Inner Palace."

The slit eyed waiting maid looked down disheartened.

It certainly was asking for the impossible with just these conditions.

It basically sounded like this: Quickly finish your job in a short time. But do not display the mental pressure you suffer from it.

As the pale newcomer behaved strange, Dolores spoke up and laughed her worries off with a small voice.

"Not quite, Milagros. You don't hide your tension from Master Zenjirou. Instead you don't be tense to begin with.

If you can't do that, just honestly apologize and he'll be sure to forgive you, so there's no reason to get tense at all."

"You ought to pull yourself a bit more together, though, Dolores."

When Dolores proudly declared to indulge in the lenience of their master, Conchita pressed her right hand against her forehead as if suppressing a headache, and warned her with a low voice.

Maybe she was not meant to teach the newcomer, but this member of the

“Three Troublemakers” instead?

Conchita harboured that thought for a moment, but as a matter of fact, these three had made themselves pleasant to Zenjirou the most amongst the waiting maids of the Inner Palace, so it was difficult for her to reprimand her.

Having said this, she could not afford to let the newcomers be affected by the “Three Troublemakers” right at the beginning.

“Take her advice with a pinch of salt. Of course it is right to conduct your task perfectly. But just like Dolores has said, Master Zenjirou will not scold you, if it is not brought to perfection, so take it easy. Okay?

Nevertheless, you will earn a scolding from Mrs. Amanda or Mrs. Ines instead of Master Zenjirou, when you take it too easy, so be careful.”

“Y-Yes, I will keep it in mind?”

As her sentence ended with a question mark, Milagros surely had not really comprehended all of it.

The majority of the tasks for the waiting maids on cleaning duty were in fact not actual cleaning.

Most of the time, they finished the cleaning while Zenjirou was away and when he got back, they were put on standby in the next room for spontaneous orders.

But Zenjirou rarely called the maids, if ever, and was rather unassuming, whereas their other master, Queen Aura, was too busy and not even in the Inner Palace during the day.

On top of that, Zenjirou was currently gone, on his way to the far-off March of Guzzle.

As a result, Dolores, Conchita and Milagros could enjoy some comfy teatime in the ready room after they finished the cleaning.

“Conchita, I brought some cherry tart along with the tea from the kitchen.”

“Oh, well done, Dolores. Let us have some then.”

It was nothing unusual for Dolores, considering she was one of the Three

Troublemakers, but even the reliable and older Conchita made herself at home quite naturally. She poured the tea from its silver pot into their wooden cups and cut the sweet smelling cheery tart with a silver knife.

Because it was too hard cutting the round tart into three equal portions, she cut it into six pieces instead and put two pieces on each of the three wooden plates.

"We do not get the chance often, so let us eat it while it is still warm. Here, Milagros, eat up. You might be reluctant to eat something you have never seen before, but it is really good."

With a smile, Conchita placed the wooden plate with two slices of cherry tart and the wooden cup with tea in front of Milagros.

"Ah, yes."

Although her expression was usually hard to read because of her narrow eyes, Milagros now revealed an obvious bewilderment. It was not attributed to the fact that she had never seen a cherry tart before, though.

"Did Mrs. Vanessa bake this?"

"Not quite. She certainly helped, but Retha baked it for the most part. Her Majesty Aura won't be back until tonight after all."

Conchita and Dolores stuffed their cheeks with the cherry tart without hesitation at all while they were having a casual conversation like that.

Unaware of the circumstances, Milagros seemed to feel rather uncomfortable right now, though.

"M-Miss Conchita, is it really alright for us to enjoy some tea here without doing any work?"

The question prompted Conchita to freeze up with her wooden fork in hand.

"Huh?"

"I mean, we are making ourselves comfortable here instead of doing our work. This will not end with a simple scolding, will it?"

Asked the same stuff again, Conchita finally figured out what Milagros was

getting at.

And at the same time, she realized how unbelievably acclimated Dolores and she had gotten to the abnormality of the Inner Palace.

Three waiting maids sat at a table and had some cake with tea during the day.

Strictly speaking, it was an incredible absurd sight.

Conchita smiled at the anxious newcomer to appease her.

"Rest assured. Our job right now is simply to be in this room. We can do whatever we want to, as long as we are here."

After finishing the cleaning, the waiting maids on cleaning duty had to answer the miscellaneous wishes of Zenjirou and Aura.

Due to that, they went into the room next to the living room after the cleaning, and simply waited to be called for.

And days like today, where neither Zenjirou, nor Aura were in the Inner Palace, were no exception to the rule.

Unlike Zenjirou, who had left the capital altogether, Queen Aura could unexpectedly came back to the Inner Palace, when her schedule changed while she worked in the Royal Palace.

In light of that probability, the waiting maids had to stay in the ready room. In exchange, they were given free rein inside.

So they were allowed to have a teatime with stuff from the kitchen, like the three of them were doing right now, or they could engage in some hobbies like knitting or embroidery.

Nonetheless, they still had to stay in the small ready room the whole time, so people with low patience like Fay hated this duty. Lazy people like Dolores on the other hand, absolutely loved the cleaning duty.

The slit eye rookie still could not help but be confused after hearing the whole explanation from Dolores and Conchita, but accepted it for now.

"I see. So we are to remain here on standby, because we could be called for at any time."

Answering like that, Milagros finally reached out for her own plate.

She portioned the unfamiliar cherry tart with her fork as she had seen it done by the other two, and carried it to her mouth.

The cherries of this world were smaller than the ones sold in Modern Japan and had relatively big stones. On top of that, they were pretty sour, so the cherry tart did not taste all that good, when it was baked according to the recipe Zenjirou had bought along, but Vanessa had improved the recipe to something delicious with her abundant knowledge of ingredients.

The tart base was baked firm and crispy and then arranged thoroughly with bright red cherries, so that the sweet, yet still somewhat sour flavour of the cherries melted together with the flavour of the dough, its sweetness was kept relatively down, in your mouth.

On a glance, the cherries looked whole, but they had actually been cut on the bottom to remove the stones, so you did not need to worry about eating them.

“W-Wow, so good... Can I really eat all of this?”

After just one mouthful, Milagros could already guess that the tart would cost quite a fortune, if you were to translate the used ingredients and effort into money, so she asked that before she knew it.

But at the same time, she already moved her hand with the fork towards the tart again, so it was beyond all question that she was smitten with its taste.

Dolores proudly replied to the question of the rookie as though she had baked it herself.

“No worries. The maids in the kitchen practice their cooking on days like today, where Master Zenjirou and Her Majesty Aura aren’t in the Inner Palace during the day.

Of course the stuff isn’t as good as when Mrs. Vanessa makes it, so we can’t serve it to Master Zenjirou, but it would be a waste to just throw it away, too. Hence we ‘dispose’ of it ourselves.”

With a smile, Dolores named it their special privilege as waiting maids of the Inner Palace, but Milagros only replied with a vague “okay” as she did not quite

get it.

The young waiting maids had no choice but to cook actual dishes to improve their cooking skills. But these imperfect dishes could not be served to their masters Zenjirou and Aura, so the young waiting maids dealt with it amongst themselves.

Preparing tea was also a task of a waiting maid, so it was inevitable that they were practicing their skills by preparing tea for themselves as well.

The logic behind that made sense, but Milagros felt a bit stupid for trying her hardest to not embarrass her family with her behaviour, when she sat here now leisurely, enjoying some elaborate sweets and an aromatic top-class tea.

At the morning assembly, Supervisory Maid Amanda had emphasised that they were here in the Inner Palace as a mere workforce and that they should not presume too far, but when they were being entertained like this, it made that statement seem dubious.

(Mrs. Ines denied it, but I guess we are expected to become concubines after all?)

Milagros was aware that girls with better status, magical power and appearance than her had failed the selection, so she had accepted the assertion that they were a “mere workforce”, but she started to get her hopes a bit up now that she was getting such a treatment.

Moreover, Conchita made another surprising proposal, when they had finished eating the cherry tart.

“Hey, Milagros, are you tired by chance? If so, you may lay down on that couch for a while.”

“Lay down? You mean to take a midday nap? We are in the middle of the Vibrant Season, though?”

In the Carpa Kingdom it was only natural that workers would take a midday nap during the Hottest Season, so the proposal itself was not all that surprising, but it was contrary to expectation to recommend one during the Vibrant Season.

As she had foreseen her reaction, Conchita looked at Dolores and smiled a bit.

"We are already used to it, but it might be a bit tough on you in the beginning. You see, the girls on cleaning duty have to stay here the whole time until Master Zenjirou and Her Majesty Aura go to bed."

"Yes, that makes sense."

The explanation from Conchita by itself only sounded like common sense for a waiting maid, so Milagros could not help but cock her head puzzled.

"Well, you will learn soon enough. We will carry you back to your room, if you fall asleep at some point, so do not worry about that."

Influenced by Zenjirou, who had been used to get back home only after midnight, and his LED floor lamps, Queen Aura was now going to bed rather late according to the standards of the Carpa Kingdom as well.

"...Okay?"

The confused Milagros would have to wait until night to find out about its meaning.

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Around the same time, the three waiting maids on gardening duty were washing off their sweat in the bath after they had finished their morning workload.

At night, they only had the white light of Zenjirou's LED lamp to rely on, but the sun was still out right now.

The numerous windows high up in the bath were opened and let the sunlight in so that it illuminated the whole stony bathroom.

"Yahoo, feels great!"

Pouring the cold water from the wooden bucket over her head, Fay exclaimed merrily like a child.

The temperatures during the Vibrant Season were not all that high during the day, but your body still ended up working up a sweat, when you spent plucking weeds in the midday sun for hours.

"Kyah! Cold!!"

Apparently some of the water Fay showered herself with had splashed on her, so the petite girl sitting next to Fay raised a scream in reaction to it.

"Oh, sorry, Manola. Did I hit you?"

"Ah, well, it is okay."

The petite waiting maid Manola replied to the casual apology of her senior with a weak voice.

"Okay, I'll wash your back as an apology! C'mon, sit down here."

Energetic as always, Fay said this and tapped on the wooden stool before her.

"Huh? N-No, you do not need to. I can..."

"Don't be shy!"

As her junior was fidgeting around while hiding her naked body with a small towel, Fay grasped her left hand with her own right hand and pulled her over.

"Ah, no, you really do not need to... Uhm, p-please do then..."

After some back and forth, Manola was made to sit down before Fay at last.

A pushy senior against a weak-willed junior. There was no way that the weak-willed junior could hold her ground in such a situation.

Needless to say, Fay meant no harm.

She was just too eager to show off in front of her first junior.

All the more because Manola was even shorter than Fay, who had been the shortest maid in the Inner Palace up till now, so she was truly easy prey for Fay.

If he had seen this, Zenjirou would probably say this: "Oh, we had a guy like that in the soccer club, too. He really went nuts in trying to show off once we got new members."

Anyway, the now second-generation senior was scolded by her even older first-generation senior.

"Stop it, Fay. You are bothering Manola. I appreciate that you want to teach the newcomer the unfamiliar bathing custom of the Inner Palace, but pace

yourself, will you?"

Sabrina reprimanded Fay with a smile and soft tone.

Although they had been admitted into the Inner Palace at the same time, Sabrina was a couple of years older, so Fay could not talk back to her.

"Muh..."

Puckering her lips, Fay fell silent, whereat Sabrina pressed her on.

"Come on. You were going to teach her, right? She has no idea about the soap, so show her how to properly use it."

A simpleton by nature, Fay immediately regained her bright smile, when Sabrina told her that.

"Right. Listen, Manola, all the maids working in the Inner Palace use this soap to wash themselves. Well, you can skip it once, when you take a bath twice like today, but I'm going to show you how to do it now."

With these words, Fay pulled the small bottle with the fluid soap closer and tipped a bit into her right hand.

"Uhm, what exactly is that?"

Peeking at Fay, who rubbed the sticky white fluid into the hand towel, the short new waiting maid timidly leaned forward from across to get a better look.

Her curiosity prevailed against her weak-willed and cautious nature. She conducted herself like a cute little animal about to be fed.

"This is called soap. Master Zenjirou made it and we wash our bodies with it. Here, try it, too."

"Ah, yes, I will. Like this? ...Uwah, it smells really nice."

Mimicking her, the petite newcomer put some of the fluid soap into her hand, too, and rejoiced at the sweet smell of it.

"Is this perfumed oil?"

"Nope, it's soap. But it contains perfumed oil. Peppermint in this case."

Once Zenjirou had worked out the procedure, he revealed the recipe to the

purveyor to the court and left the production to him.

By now, they were just periodically stocking up on the finished product. As expected of the purveyor to the court, the quality was a lot better than when Zenjirou had made it himself, and the goods on sale no longer had a lingering smell of oil.

The fluid soap made in this world certainly foamed less than the one Zenjirou had brought along from Earth, but it still met the standards sufficiently.

“Yes, you foam it up in the towel like this and then wash your body.”

“Oh, I understand.”

“But be careful. It really stings, when the soap gets in your eyes, so wash it out immediately, if that happens.”

“Yes, of course, Miss Sabrina.”

Any daughter of a noble had experiences with bathes, if not necessarily with the soap.

Manola then washed her body without much trouble, rinsed the foam off with hot water and shook her body like a small wet animal.

Before long, she had finished washing her body, so Manola sat down in the hot bath with Sabrina. Left alone, Fay took out a silver vial and started to wash her hair with its contents.

“Oh my. What do you have there, Fay?”

Sabrina had made herself comfortable in the bath so that her huge breasts were floating on the water, when she noticed the substance in Fay’s hands for the first time and looked at it.

Fay threw out her chest and proclaimed proudly.

“Ehe~ Master Zenjirou gave me special soap for my hair. It’s called ‘shampoo’ and ‘rinse’. Ah, but you can’t have any, Manola. Actually, no one else but me’s allowed to use it. It’s apparently still in the test phase and who knows what it will do.”

What she said was nothing to be proud of, though. In other words: she was

used as a guinea pig.

“Will you be fine?”

Sabrina frowned worried, whereupon Fay answered nonchalantly.

“Hmm, Master Zenjirou said to stop as soon as it prickles or my hair becomes brittle. But I get a gold coin, when that happens, and even if it doesn’t, I get a silver coin. And I mean one of the new post-war silver coins.”

It was unknown what kind of effects the handmade shampoo or rinse would have after their application. Normally, Zenjirou would try it out on himself, but he was not allowed put himself at risk as a vital member of the Royal Family.

As a result, the waiting maids had to serve as a guinea pig once again.

The reason why Fay had been chosen as the only test subject this time around was that she was the only waiting maid in the Inner Palace with short hair.

Just because it was short did not mean that you could trifle with it, but in the worst case, if Fay were to have to shave it off completely, it would only take one or two years to grow back to its former length.

So Zenjirou felt less guilty, since she would only be affected for a short time, quite contrary to the other waiting maids, whose hair extended down to their waists.

“Oh, cool. It’s not all that bad. Feels refreshing.”

Watched over by her senior and junior from the bath, Fay washed her hair hearty with the handmade shampoo.

“Ehm, I think I’m supposed to wash it off properly before I apply the rinse...”

Apparently she took her task with the special bonus from Zenjirou quite seriously. Fay recalled his instructions and faithfully put them into practice.

“Lastly, wash it off again with hot water. Okay, all done.”

After she had completely washed off the rinse with several buckets of hot water from the bath, Fay took a wrung out towel and wiped her frisky short hair dry with it.

“Now I’m ready to go, too. A hot bath isn’t all that bad at this season.”

With these words, Fay stepped into the bathtub, where Sabrina and Manola were already sitting. She usually preferred a cold bath over a hot one, but right now, in the latter half the Vibrant Season, she was fine with soaking in a hot bath as well.

"Phew."

"You have earned it, Fay. Now tell us, how was that so-called shampoo and rinse?"

Sabrina smiled softly, whereat Fay felt her hair with her right hand as she answered.

"Hmm, quite nice? And really refreshing. So far, it doesn't feel brittle or dry like Master Zenjirou had feared, but well, I won't know for sure until later."

"Oh, interesting. You think the merchant will sell this later on as well? If so, I might be able to allow myself to get at least one for my 'special day'."

Although the purveyor to the court had started to mass-produce it, the soap was still a luxury article. Considering that, the shampoo and rinse would be unaffordable to commoners for a while longer, too.

Sabrina admittedly came from a noble family, but it was a lower ranking one with no financial leeway, so the articles would pretty much out of her reach once she left the Inner Palace.

Listening to their conversation, the petite newcomer was once again reminded of the extraordinary circumstances here, so she timidly rose to speak.

"Say... Are we really allowed to do this? We will not get scolded for it later on?"

She unexpectedly harboured the same doubt as Milagros during the tea party in the ready room. It proved how unusual the lifestyle of the waiting maids in the Inner Palace was to outsiders.

But Fay and Sabrina allayed her fears with a smile after they exchanged glances.

"No worries. You also heard what Mrs. Emilia said: 'Refresh yourselves in the bath.'"

"You might be worried, since you do not know about the bathing customs here, but if anything, taking a bath is actually part of our duties. You see, Master Zenjirou takes the view that everyone working in the Inner Palace has to keep themselves as clean as possible."

Sabrina was stating a fact.

Of course Zenjirou had never said it out aloud, nor demanded it from them, but Supervisory Maid Amanda had noticed that he felt uneasy towards people, who wore dirty clothes, were too sweaty or applied too much perfumed oil, so she had imposed the obligation on the waiting maids to properly take care of baths and a change of clothes.

But the explanation from Sabrina was a bit lacking. At the very least so much so that Manola misunderstood yet again.

"Part of our duty. Master Zenjirou wills it. I see. So it is like that after all. Mrs. Amanda might have denied it, but I guess it is true after all.

Have you two gone through it already? D-Do you think I will be called in, too?"

Sabrina blankly batted an eye in reaction to the surprised and worried, but also somewhat hopeful utterance from Manola, before she realized that the girl was misunderstanding something.

The waiting maids had to take a bath as part of their duties and Zenjirou wanted them to be clean at all times.

Considering just that, one would naturally think that Zenjirou was a horny master, who played around with the maids at any time.

"No, Manola. You are misunderstanding. Like Mrs. Amanda had said, you do not need to be worried about being called to his bedroom. At the very least, no one of us has ever been called for so far."

"R-Really? Maybe they are just ordered to hold their tongues?"

Her doubtful reaction could be considered as only natural.

As a matter of fact, it was not all that unusual to keep a relationship secret, since it often caused unrest amongst the waiting maids, if one or more received

the favour of their master.

But Sabrina shook her head, still smiling.

"Not possible. We all share rooms in groups of three. We would know for sure if someone were to be summoned."

"Besides, Master Zenjirou sleeps together with Her Majesty Aura every night. He has no time to call in other women."

Fay stopped her with a wave of her hand, laughing cackling, which prompted Manola to cock her head even more puzzled.

"Huh? But Her Majesty Aura has already given birth before, right? I assume the childbearing period was rather long."

"Yep, but even then, they slept together. Master Zenjirou went out of his way to get a separate bed in their bedroom to sleep in. He wanted to sleep at least in the same room, even if he wasn't allowed to sleep in the same bed."

"Wow, how romantic."

Manola spontaneously put her hands together above the water with a dreamful look in her eyes.

Like any other girl her age, she also seemed to have a weakness for love stories.

Fay continued the story.

"To begin with, Sabrina would be the first to be called in, if at all. So as long as she hasn't been send for, we others have no chance."

"I hear that a lot, but I think it is not that simple. Admittedly, Master Zenjirou is head over heels for Her Majesty Aura, but that does not guarantee me his favour."

A troubled Sabrina revealed a bitter smile in light of Fay's appraisal.

"Eh? Oh, right! Now I know whom you reminded me of, Miss Sabrina!"

Looking at Sabrina, who had immersed herself into the bath up till her shoulders, Manola exclaimed surprised, when she figured out what Fay was hinting at.

Long, red hair and a height of about one-hundred and seventy centimetre coupled with a distinctive chest and waist. Amongst the waiting maids of the Inner Palace, Sabrina was the one, whose appearance resembled the one of Queen Aura the most.

Unlike Aura, who had trained her body as a soldier, Sabrina was well-rounded, had sloping shoulders and a meek aura due to her drooping eyes, so it was a bit of an overstatement to say that she resembled Aura.

And like Sabrina had said, Zenjirou had not fallen for Aura's outward appearance alone anyway, so he did not treat Sabrina any differently from the other maids.

"Well, I cannot deny the fact that I did get my hopes a bit, too, seeing as everyone said so."

The red-haired maid stuck out her tongue a bit and looked out of the window at the blue sky so that her expression could not be seen.

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At night of the same day.

For the first time, since they had entered the Inner Palace, the Three Troublemakers had worked in completely different teams over the day and were finally seeing each other again in their room at night.

"Man, what a day."

"Yeah, working with the rookie was more tiring than I thought. Our girl suddenly starting dozing off in the ready room. She was quite a handful."

"Good job, Fay-chan, Dolores-chan. I did not have to look after a rookie, but I was all alone with Kate-chan, so we had our hands full, too~"

Fay, Dolores and Rethé each sat down on their own bed and talked about their respective experiences of the day with a tired voice.

Despite their differences, the three of them were a well attuned team, so when they were separated and had to work with a rookie and a less acquainted older maid for a day, it became so much more exhausting already.

"Well, the girl in our group is diligent, so I doubt she'll be a handful for long."

Dolores praised the rookie in her group like this, so Fay offered her own praise in reply to her.

"Boah, what a pompous praise. Our Manola-chan is really cute, too. She's small, timid and always trembling from nervousness. It's really cute!"

"That's bad, isn't it? You can't have a nervous wreck like her be around Master Zenjirou."

"Nah, she's just not used to her new home yet. Once she meets Master Zenjirou and spends a few days here, her nervousness will be all gone."

"Hmm, guess so."

Dolores easily acknowledged her rowdy argument.

The newly admitted girls had not yet met their Master, so they were anxious about the mysterious existence that literally had control over their life or death.

As soon as they learned about the person behind the title, they would loose their tension. Dolores and the other two could claim that from their own experience.

"Still, first Keyshia's getting married and now even Conchita and Sabrina. We're losing quite a bit of people all of a sudden."

Fay spoke with a pensively voice on a rare occasion, whereupon Dolores answered with a feigned cold-hearted tone.

"It goes without saying. They're already twenty years old this year. Normally it would be their last chance to get married and even as a waiting maid of the Inner Palace, it's the perfect point in time."

"Yeah, well, how do I put it? It just came home to me that time doesn't stand still."

Fay replied with that and let herself flop on her back in her casual clothes.

"Stop being so carefree, Fay. This is only the beginning. You, too, must have at least heard the rumours about what Master Zenjirou's doing right now with whom."

Her words were directed at Fay, of course, but even Rethe, who had silently

listened to them so far, now leaned forward on her bed and joined the conversation.

"You mean Princess Freya? His partner for the marriage ceremony."

"I guess she'll become his concubine in the future? Then she'll start living here, right?"

The first concubine might finally come into the Inner Palace.

The situation in the Inner Palace would greatly change then for better or worse. A fundamental change one size larger than the current change of staff.

"Nothing is set in stone yet, so we can only speculate, but if everything goes well, it will happen."

Illuminated by the light of the oil pan burning in one corner of the room, Dolores's profile revealed a hint of graveness.

If they were allowed to speak their mind, no waiting maid would be thrilled about welcoming a concubine.

The Inner Palace was tranquil right now. Their two masters, Zenjirou and Aura, were getting along extremely well, had both a composed personality and never vented their anger on the waiting maids.

From the waiting maids' point of view, there could not be a better workplace, so they would obviously not endorse it, when a "foreign body" was implanted into it.

"Well, it takes years to negotiate marriages of royalty or higher nobility, so it won't affect us any time soon."

Dolores sounded like she wanted to convince herself, whereas Fay stretched out her legs from the bed, trashed about and shouted with a small voice.

"Then I hope they'll take at least three years for it. It won't have anything to do with me anymore in three years."

"Yes, it's quite likely that we'll be retired for marriage, too, in three years. I can relate, but don't you go blaring it out to others."

As her little roommate complained just for her own convenience, the tall

Dolores crossed her long legs anew and smiled wryly.

"I know, I know. It's just between us."

"Seeing you like this, I can't really imagine you getting married in three years, though."

"Ugh, me neither."

Fay agreed to the sarcasm of her roommate without getting angry.

As a matter of fact, it was quite difficult to imagine that the girl trashing about on her bed like this, was actually at a marriageable age and would be past the commonly agreed prime of life in three years.

It had been more or less two years, since they entered the Inner Palace, but Fay showed no signs of having matured at all during that time.

Having said this, she could not avoid marriage, since she was the daughter of a noble.

"I bet Rethé gets lot of offers, though."

Sitting up on her bed, Fay looked at her other roommate sitting diagonally across from her.

She had an average height for a woman of the Carpa Kingdom. Her hair was light-coloured and fluffy, her facial features smooth and gentle.

And her breasts were so voluminous that they bewitched well and truly every men (each of them would at least look once at them, whereas one out of five took a closer look) she met for the first time.

Rethé was definitely popular with the men. It was easy to imagine her as the wife of someone.

But she shook her head a bit troubled, when her roommate address her,

"Well, I might not get married at all."

And dropped a bombshell.

"EH!? WHY!?"

"Did something happen in your family, Rethé!?"

In the middle of the night, Fay and Dolores raised loud voices, whereupon Rethé quickly stopped them with a wave of her hand.

"N-No~ Not like that. It is my personal wish. If my father allows it, I want to stay here in the Inner Palace."

"Stay here? Are you aspiring to be concubine, Rethé?"

"That's a rocky road. Waiting maids already have a hard time becoming concubines in normal households due to the difference in standings. And even more so, when you're up against Her Majesty Aura, a legal wife."

"I said it is not like that. Mrs. Vanessa told me today that I could succeed her if I train diligently for three more years. I think that such a life would not be bad, either."

Hearing the desperate explanation from Rethé, Fay and Dolores lost all their momentum.

"Oh, just that."

"Geez, stop startling me like that."

"Sorry~ I phrased it a bit misleading."

Rethé smiled softly as she apologized.

Dolores had calmed down after understanding her intention, but frowned a bit as she pondered.

"But that's no easy path, either. Succeeding Mrs. Vanessa without leaving means you stay single for life, right? That decision shouldn't be treated lightly."

"Yeah. Mrs. Amanda and the other department heads are all married, except Mrs. Ines. You ought to leave, get married and come back here, when you're older, Rethé."

I'm sure Master Zenjirou will be fine with that."

Sitting upright, Fay assumed a stern expression for once and gave her roommate an advice about her future.

Just like Dolores and Fay had said, it was not that easy for noble daughters in this world to choose to remain "unmarried".

It was generally accepted within the whole country that the happiness of a woman only consisted in marriage. Needless to say, Rethé was born and raised with these moral values as well.

Once she chose not to get married and reached a certain age, it was too late for regret.

Rethé was moved by the passionate advice from her roommates, so she dropped her gaze preoccupied.

"Yes, you are right. Cooking is my passion, so I might have gotten a bit carried away, when Mrs. Vanessa praised it. I will think about it carefully."

Dolores heaved a sigh of relief in light of her answer.

"Good. Either way, you have three years left, so if you want to choose marriage instead by that time, it's still not too late."

Even if she were to chose to get married after devoting all of her time in the Inner Palace to improve her cooking skills, it would not have been in vain.

Therefore she should simply enjoy her life as a waiting maid while working on her cooking skills for now.

The days in the Inner Palace could be considered a kind of moratorium period for the young waiting maids.

Isolated from the hustle and bustle of the world, they comfortable spent a peaceful time here.

Fay then gave voice to her worries as though blowing the heavy atmosphere off.

"But when we get married, we're going to live in our husband's house, right? I'm worried if I can fit in. I mean, that house won't have midday baths, snacks at noon or ice during the Hottest Season."

"That... goes without saying. And you can't take your time cleaning the bedroom anymore, since it won't have any air conditioning."

"...O-Okay, I will improve my cooking and stay in the Inner Palace after all~"

The Three Troublemakers had accommodated themselves to serving Zenjirou

more than anyone.

Picturing a life without the advantages of Modern Earth, the three of them started to feel quite concerned about their future after all this time.